SIR ISUMBRAS AT THE FORD

By D. K. Broster

SIR ISUMBRAS AT THE FORD
THE YELLOW POPPY
THE WOUNDED NAME
'MR. ROWL'
THE FLIGHT OF THE HERON
THE GLEAM IN THE NORTH
THE DARK MILE
SHIPS IN THE BAY!
A FIRE OF DRIFTWOOD
ALMOND, WILD ALMOND
CHILD ROYAL
THE SEA WITHOUT A HAVEN
COUCHING AT THE DOOR
THE CAPTAIN'S LADY

With G. W. Taylor

CHANTEMERLE
THE VISION SPLENDID

With G. Forester

WORLD UNDER SNOW

Sir Isumbras at the Ford

By

D. K. Broster

15940

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
MELBOURNE :: LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED (*Mr. John Murray*) 1918
REPRINTED 1918
NEW EDITION (*Wm. Heinemann Ltd.*) 1926
REPRINTED 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931,
1934, 1935, 1955

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE WINDMILL PRESS
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

TO

BARBARA AND HER SON PHILIP

"AND als he wente by a woodë schawe,
Thare mette he with a lytille knave
Came rynnande him agayne—
'Gramercy, faire Syr Isumbras,
Have pitie on us in this case,
And lifte us uppe for Marie's grace!'
N'as never childe so fayne.
Theretoe of a mayden he was ware,
That over floude ne mighte not fare,
Sir Ysumbras stoopède him thare
And uppe ahent hem twayne."

METRICAL ROMANCE OF SIR YSUMBRAS.

15140

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE

THE ROAD TO FRANCE

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	ANNE-HILARION GETS OUT OF BED	
II.	AND IS PUT BACK AGAIN	10
III.	PURCHASE OF A GOLDFISH, AND OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS	19
IV.	VISIT TO TWO FAIRY GODMOTHERS	26
V	THOMAS THE RHYMER	37
VI.	"A LITTLE BOY LOST"	45
VII.	THE CHEVALIER DE LA VIREVILLE MEETS "MONSIEUR AUGUSTIN"	54

BOOK TWO

THE ROAD TO ENGLAND

VIII.	SOME RESULTS OF LISTENING TO POETRY	69
IX.	THE *TROIS FRÈRES* OF CAEN	82
X.	HAPPENINGS IN A POSTCHAISE	90
XI.	"FIFTY FATHOMS DEEP"	103
XII.	INTRODUCING GRAIN D'ORGE	115

CHAP.		PAGE
XIII.	FAR IN THE FOREST	124
XIV.	CÆSAREA THE GREEN	134
XV.	CAVENDISH SQUARE ONCE MORE	145
XVI.	THE AGENT DE LA CORRESPONDANCE	151
XVII.	STRANGE CONDUCT OF THE AGENT	160
XVIII.	EQUALLY SURPRISING CONDUCT OF "MONSIEUR AUGUSTIN"	168
XIX.	LA PORTE DU MANOIR	179
XX.	SEA-HOLLY	188
XXI.	HOW ANNE-HILARION FED THE DUCKS	203

BOOK THREE

THE ROAD THAT FEW RETURNED ON

XXII.	"TO NOROWAY, TO NOROWAY"	217
XXIII.	DISPLEASURE OF "MONSIEUR AUGUSTIN"	226
XXIV.	CREEPING FATE	231
XXV.	HISTORY OF A SCAR	242
XXVI.	STE. BARBE—AND AFTERWARDS	250
XXVII.	LA VIREVILLE BREAKS HIS SWORD	261
XXVIII.	MR. TOLLEMACHE AS AN ARCHANGEL	272
XXIX.	VÆ VICTIS!	286
XXX.	ATROPOS	294
XXXI.	THE PAYING OF THE SCORE	302
XXXII.	DEAD LEAVES	309

CHAP. PAGE
XXXIII. THE MAN SHE WOULD HAVE MARRIED . 318
XXXIV. MONSEIGNEUR'S GUEST 324
XXXV. MR. TOLLEMACHE AS A LINGUIST . . 335
XXXVI. ANNE-HILARION MAKES A PLAN, AND THE BISHOP A REVELATION . . . 345
XXXVII. THE CHILD UNLOCKS THE DOOR . . 354

BOOK FOUR

THE OLDEST ROAD OF ALL

XXXVIII. FLOWER OF THE GORSE 365
XXXIX. FLOWER OF THE FOAM 375

BOOK ONE

THE ROAD TO FRANCE

"But, Thomas, ye sall haud your tongue,
Whatever ye may hear or see;
For speak ye word in Elflyn-land,
Ye'll ne'er win back to your ain countrie."

THOMAS THE RHYMER.

SIR ISUMBRAS AT THE FORD

CHAPTER I

ANNE-HILARION GETS OUT OF BED

(I)

"AND weel ye ken, Maister Anne, ye should hae been asleep lang syne!" said Elspeth severely.

Master Anne—M. le Comte Anne-Hilarion de Flavigny—gave a little sigh from the bed. "I *have* tried . . . if you would say 'Noroway,' perhaps? . . . Say 'Noroway-over-the-foam,' Elspeth, je vous en prie!"

"Dinna be using ony of yer French havers tae me, wean!" exclaimed the elderly woman thus addressed, still more threateningly. "Aweel then. . . . Ye're no' for 'True Thomas' the nicht?"

The silky brown head on the pillow was shaken. "No, please. I like well enough the Queen of Elfland, but best of all 'Noroway-over-the-foam' and the shoes with cork heels."

Elspeth Saunders grunted, for there was something highly congenial to her Calvinistic soul in that verse of 'Thomas the Rhymer' which deals with the Path of Wickedness—'Yon braid, braid road that lies across the lily leven,' and she was accustomed

to render it with unction. However, she sat down, took up her knitting, and began :

"'The king sat in Dunfermline toun
Drinking the blude-red wine,'"

and the little Franco-Scottish boy in the curtained bed closed his eyes, that he might seem to be composing himself to slumber. In reality he was seeing the pictures which are set in that most vivid of all ballads —Sir Patrick Spens receiving the King's letter as he walked on the seashore, the sailor telling of the new moon with the old in her arms (a phenomenon never quite clear to the Comte de Flavigny), the storm and shipwreck, and the ladies with their fans, the maidens with their golden combs, waiting for those who would never come back again.

"'And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens
Wi' the Scots lords at his feet,'"

finished Elspeth. The knitting needles proceeded a little with their tale, then they too stopped.

"Losh! the bairn's asleep already!" thought Mrs. Saunders, looking over her spectacles. She tiptoed from the room.

Yet although Anne-Hilarion's long lashes lay quietly on his cheeks he was not by any means asleep, and under those dark curtains he watched, not without a certain drowsiness, the gigantic shadow of his attendant vanish from the wall. The night-light shed a very faint gleam on the vast mahogany wardrobe, whose polished doors reflected darkly much that passed without, and suggested, to a lively imagination, all kinds of secret happenings within. It also illumined Anne's minute garments, neatly folded on a chair, his high-waisted blue kerseymere pantaloons on the top of the pile, and the small coat, into which Elspeth had been sewing a fresh ruffle, over the back. This much of his apartment could Anne see between the chintz curtains, figured with many a long-tailed tropic bird, which hung tent-like from the short pole fixed

in the wall above his pillow. But he could not see Mme. d'Aulnoy's fairy-tales, in their original French, which were lying face downwards on the floor not very far away (and which he would be scolded for having left about, when they were found to-morrow); nor the figure of Notre Dame de Pontmain, in her star-decked robe of blue and her long black veil, holding in her hands not her Son but a crucifix—the figure which M. l'Abbé, being of Laval, her country, had given to the little boy. For this image had a knack of disappearing entirely when Anne's father the Marquis was away since, as may readily be supposed, it found no favour in the eyes of Mrs. Saunders, and was an even more violent irritant than all 'the bairn's Popish exercises,' to which she would so much have liked to put an end. That she might see as little as possible of the heathen idol she had banished it, with its bracket, to an obscure corner of the room, over the discarded high nursery-chair in which Anne, at six years old, no longer took his meals. The fact of the image's being in the room at all just now showed that the Marquis was at home . . . for to him, as to his small son, in this April of the year 1795, the solid Cavendish Square house was home, though it belonged to neither of them. Anne-Hilarion, for his part, could remember no other.

(2)

The unusual presence of a statue of the Virgin, and of Mme. d'Aulnoy's *Contes de fées* on the second floor of this London house, was, naturally, but a consequence of that same series of events which had brought thither their small owner. Seven years before, the only daughter of James Elphinstone of Glenauchtie, a retired official of high standing in the service of John Company, had lost her heart to a young Frenchman, the Marquis René de Flavigny, whom she had

met on a visit to Paris. Although the necessary separation from his daughter was very bitter to him, Mr. Elphinstone could find no real objection to the match, and so the Scotch girl and the Frenchman were married, lived happily on de Flavigny's estate in the Nivernais, and were joined there in due time by a son.

But Anne-Hilarion had not chosen well the date of his entry into this world. On the very July day that René and Janet de Flavigny and all their tenants were celebrating the admirable prowess displayed by M. le Comte in attaining, without accident or illness —without flying back to heaven, as his nurse had it— the age of one year, the people of Paris also were keeping a festival, the first anniversary of the day when the bloody head of the governor of the Bastille had swung along the streets at the end of a pike. Before that summer was out the Marquis de Flavigny, urged by his father-in-law, had decided to place his wife and child in safety, and so, bidding the most reluctant of good-byes to the tourelles and the swans which had witnessed their two short years of happiness, they left France for England. Perhaps they would have fared no worse had they remained there. For Janet de Flavigny caught on the journey a chill from which she never recovered, and died, after a few months, leaving to her little son not even a memory, and to these two men who had passionately loved her a remembrance only too poignant.

Her death forced both their lives into fresh channels. Mr. Elphinstone left Scotland and settled in London, where, to distract himself from his grief, he began to write those long-planned memoirs of his Indian career which, after more than four years, still absorbed him. As for the Marquis de Flavigny, having once emigrated, he could not now return to France even had he wished it. He therefore threw himself heart and soul into the schemes of French Royalism, at first for the rescue of the Royal Family from their quasi-imprisonment

in their own palace, and—now that King and Queen alike were done to death, their children captives and a Republic in being—into all the hopes that centred round the stubborn loyalists of Brittany, Maine, and Vendée, round du Boisguy or Stofflet or Charette. And though the rightful little King might be close prisoner in the Temple, his uncles—the Comte de Provence (Regent in name of France) and the Comte d'Artois—were still at large, as exiles, in Europe, and it was to one or other of these princes that Royalist émigrés looked, and under their ægis that they plotted and fought. Not many of them, impoverished as they were by the Revolution, had the good fortune to possess, like René de Flavigny, a British father-in-law who put money and house at his son-in-law's disposal, welcomed his friends, and strove to bear his absences on Royalist business with equanimity.

The fact was that the young Frenchman had become very dear to Mr. Elphinstone, not only for Janet's sake but also for his own. He had liked de Flavigny from the first moment that he met him; it was only during the shock of finding that Janet wished to marry him that his feelings had temporarily cooled. Indeed, René de Flavigny's character and disposition were not ill summed up in the word 'lovable.' He had little of the traditional French gaiety—and still less after his wife's death—just as Mr. Elphinstone had little of the traditional Scotch dourness. And the old man knew how happy his daughter was with him. Afterwards, their common bereavement drew the two more than ever together. Mr. Elphinstone discovered in his son-in-law tastes and sympathies more akin to his own than he had imagined, and sometimes, though he would not have had him settle down, at thirty-two, into a bookworm like himself, he regretted the political activities in which the Marquis was immersed, for he knew him to be of too fine a temper to take pleasure in the plottings and intrigues which almost of necessity accompany the

attempts to reinstate a dispossessed dynasty. And while not, perhaps, taking those plottings over-seriously, he realised that his son-in-law's tact and ability made him a very useful person to his own party and a person proportionately obnoxious to the other. The game he was engaged in playing against the French Republic was not without danger; that adversary across the Channel was known to have hidden agents in England, and if these had the opportunity as well as the orders, it was not scruples that would hold them back from actual violence. Still, that was a contingency sufficiently remote, although the thought of it sometimes caused Mr. Elphinstone to feel, during his son-in-law's absences, a certain uneasiness for his safety as well as regret at the loss of his society.

(3)

Anne-Hilarion was quite aware, in a general way, of his father's occupations. In fact, as he lay now in his bed, looking through the curtains at the wardrobe doors, he was meditating on the important meeting which Papa was having with his friends this very evening in the dining-room. He did not know exactly what they were discussing, but from something which Papa had said in his hearing he believed that there was some question of going over to France—in ships, of course, since there was sea (he did not know how much) between England and that country. And because his mind was full of Sir Patrick Spens and his shipwreck, this undertaking seemed to him terribly dangerous, and he much wished that Papa were not thinking of it.

"To Noroway, to Noroway,
To Noroway o'er the faem,"

the words lilted in his head like the rocking of a boat.

They would be going over the foam to that land which he did not remember :

"Half owre, half owre, to Aberdour,
'Tis fifty fathoms deep. . . ."

Anne had no idea what fifty fathoms might mean, but it sounded terrifying. Suppose Papa were to be drowned like that—suppose he too were obliged to stuff 'silken cloth' into the hole of the ship to keep out the water which would not be kept out! . . .

Anne-Hilarion sat up suddenly in bed and threw back the clothes. A very strong impulse, and by no means a righteous, was upon him, but he was ridden by an agonising fear, and there was nothing for it save to go down and ascertain the truth. He slipped out of bed and pattered on to the landing.

The stairs were steep, there was little light upon the road, the balusters looked like rows of brown, square-faced soldiers. Not now, however, was there room for thoughts of Barbe Bleue, that French ogre, who was possibly hanging the last but one of his wives at that moment in the linen-press, nor of the terrible Kelpie of the Flow, which might that evening have left its Scottish loch and be looking in, with its horse face, at the staircase window. No, the chief terror was really Elspeth, who would certainly snatch him swiftly back to bed, not comprehending (nor he either, for that matter) how it was she who had started him on the path of this fear. So he went down as quickly as one foot at a time permitted, knowing that Grand-papa would be safe and busy in his study, and that Baptiste, his father's old body-servant, was, if met, more likely to forward him in his journey than to hinder him. He would, in fact, have been rather glad to encounter that elderly slave of his as he made his solitary way down to the dining-room, past the descending row of antlers and dirks and lairds of Glenauchtie in their wigs and tartan.

CHAPTER II

AND IS PUT BACK AGAIN

(I)

BUT on the dining-room wall it was Janet Elphinstone, a fair-haired child of ten, in a long white dress girt with a blue sash, her arm over the neck of a deerhound, who looked down at the guests assembled round her father's table. Not one was of her own nationality, for Mr. Elphinstone himself had withdrawn after supper, following his custom on similar occasions, and was by now very tolerably engrossed, as usual, with his memoirs. His national shrewdness made him perfectly aware that some of his friends, and probably all of his domestics except Baptiste, esteemed that in his unfailing hospitality to his son-in-law's unfortunate compatriots he was allowing himself to be victimised by a pack of starveling adventurers, as he had once heard them called; but he considered that his conduct in this regard was no one's affair but his own, and for several of the Marquis's friends he had a great respect—they bore misfortune so gallantly. So he scratched away contentedly in the library, while in the dining-room René talked to his companions.

For though it was not primarily the personal attraction of the Marquis de Flavigny which bound together this evening's visitors, but rather devotion to a common cause, they were all his friends, from the old Abbé with the kindly, humorous mouth and the snuffy rabat to the tall, lean man with a scar on his cheek

who, at the end of the table, was lazily drawing devices on a map spread before him on the mahogany, among the empty glasses. They were talking of the intrigues and counter-intrigues which ate like a canker into the heart of the Royalist cause, dividing that never very stable house against itself, setting the party of the Comte de Provence against that of his younger brother, the Comte d'Artois, and filling the clear-minded or the generous with mingled sorrow and disgust.

"I declare," said the gentleman with the scar at the end of the table, without lifting his eyes from his occupation, "that the behaviour of the Abbé Brottier, when I think of it, renders me the prey of indigestion. So I try not to think of it."

"Perhaps you remember, my son," interposed the old priest, "what Cardinal Maury is reported to have said of him—that he would bring disunion into the very host of heaven. And we émigrés, alas, are not angels."

"M. de la Vireville's disgust is natural," observed a middle-aged, thin-featured man on the other side of the Abbé. "I have no doubt he finds the atmosphere of London stifling, and is longing to be back in the broom of Brittany with his Chouans."

"It is my desire, de Soucy," confessed he with the map, briefly. "But even there one is not safe from the meddling of that intriguer and the agence de Paris. However, this does seem a chance of moving, for once, without it, for I understand you to say, René, that Mr. Windham seriously suggests your going personally to Verona to see the Regent?"

"He thinks it advisable," answered de Flavigny. "For my part, I would much rather not put my finger between the trunk and the bark, but it has been quite clear since last November that the agence de Paris is trying to get Spanish help instead of accepting that of England, and therefore someone not under the Abbé Brottier's influence ought to lay before the Comte de Provence what the English Government is inclined to do for us—and lay it before him directly, without the

intervention of the Duc de la Vauguyon, who, as you know, is also a partisan of Madrid. Let me read to you, if I may, the notes of my conversation with Mr. Windham this morning."

He began to read out what had passed between him and that cultured, high-minded English gentleman, now Secretary for War, to whom the French émigrés in general owed so much. But he had not proceeded very far before the Chevalier de la Vireville, his bright, bold eyes fixed attentively on him, gave an exclamation:

"Messieurs, a new recruit! Welcome, small conspirator! Come in—but shut the door!"

And all the rest turned on the instant to look at the little figure, clad only in a nightshirt, which was visible in the doorway, behind René de Flavigny's back.

"Anne!" exclaimed the latter. "Whatever are you doing here—and in that costume!"

A trifle daunted, the child hung back, clutching the door handle, though he knew all the company, and one of them—he who had hailed him—had his especial favour. Then he made a dash for his father.

"Papa," he burst out, clinging to him, "do not go to Noroway-over-the-foam! You know what it says, how the feather-beds floated about in the waves, and they lost their shoes, and the sea came in, and they were all drowned fifty fathoms deep!"

"My child," said the young man gently, putting his arm round him, "what on earth are you talking about? I think you must be walking in your sleep. Nobody is going to Noroway, so nobody will be drowned. And you must not interrupt these gentlemen. You see, we are busy. You must go back to bed, my little one. La Vireville, have the goodness to ring the bell, will you?"

The tall Chouan leader rose at once from his place, but, instead of obeying, he snatched the cloth off a neighbouring table, and in a moment had picked up the intruder and enveloped him in it. "Bed is not

recommended, I think, René, for this parishioner. We cannot, however, have such a sans-culotte amongst us. That lack being remedied, I fancy we shall sleep more comfortably here, don't you, Anne ? " And he was back in his place, the boy, wrapped in the red and black tablecloth, on his knee, before even paternal authority could object.

" I am sure that is the best solution," said the old Abbé, smiling at the child over his glasses. " Pray proceed, Marquis."

So René de Flavigny finished his notes, and looked round for opinions, while his son whispered to the Chevalier de la Vireville, " Where is Verona ? Could it be fifty fathoms deep there ? " And the Chouan said softly, " No, foolish one, for it is nowhere near the sea, and all this talk only means that Papa is going to Italy to see the Regent, who is a stout, middle-aged gentleman, and not a king's daughter, so you need not be frightened."

" I am of Mr. Windham's opinion," the Vicomte de Soucy was meanwhile saying ; " and I verily believe that he has our interests at heart, probably more than Mr. Pitt, certainly more than Mr. Dundas. If the British Government really means seriously to support an expedition to France, the Regent should be sounded."

" How much does the Duc d'Harcourt know of the Government's dispositions ? " asked someone, referring to the Regent's accredited representative in London.

De Flavigny shook his head. " I do not know."

" In any case you must disregard him—go behind him, in fact," observed the Chevalier de la Vireville, settling Anne-Hilarion in his arms.

" I suppose so," said de Flavigny, with an expression of distaste, for he did not like the task, as he had said.

" And Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois ? " asked the Abbé.

" Of course the Government will acquaint him in good time. Almost certainly His Royal Highness

will wish to lead the expedition. But since he is so near, at Bremen or thereabouts, there will be little difficulty in personal communication with him later, if this project of the Government comes to anything."

"As no doubt it will not," observed La Vireville sceptically.

"If ever it did, *Monsieur Augustin*," remarked M. de Soucy, with an emphasis on the name, "it would concern you very much, I imagine. For if, as seems natural, it took place in the West, you could join it with your Chouans, while we, though we should bring our swords, could bring nothing else."

La Vireville nodded.

"It goes without question," said a voice, "that any expeditionary force should be landed in the West; the question is, Where?"

"A port would be needed, of course," said de Flavigny, "and the port would be best as near M. de Charette as possible, if not actually in Vendée."

"If the country south of the Loire is suggested," objected La Vireville, "the expedition will not have any support to speak of from the Chouans. I know the Breton; he will not willingly leave his province, even his corner of it. It will be as much as we can do to induce those of Northern Brittany to go to South Brittany, supposing, for instance, a landing were effected in the Morbihan, as being near Vendée."

"It was the Morbihan that Mr. Windham had in his mind, I think," said the Marquis de Flavigny. "He had even thought of a place, but he said that if it was finally decided upon, it would have, of course, to be kept secret till the last moment."

"And what was the place?"

René de Flavigny lowered his voice. "Quiberon Bay."

"Not a name of good omen to a Frenchman," observed the Abbé, thinking of Hawke's victory of nearly half a century ago.

"Where exactly is Quiberon Bay?" inquired M. de Soucy, who was of Lorraine.

The Chevalier de la Vireville pushed the map of Brittany towards him, putting his finger on a long, thin tongue of land at the bottom. "Permit me to observe, Messieurs," he said, "that we are wandering from the immediate question, which is, Verona or not Verona? I cannot see that to approach the Regent can do harm, and so long as I myself," he smiled, "am not required to undertake diplomatic service, I am more than willing to push a friend into it. If it be conceded that one of us should go, then I think that de Flavigny is the person. He has rank, something of diplomatic training in the past, and—though I say it to his face—an address likely to commend itself to Monseigneur. Then, too, René, you were in his household in old days, were you not?"

"I was one of his pages," assented the Marquis. "Well, gentlemen, if you wish it, I will go to Verona, and, I suppose, the sooner the better. Will you drink a glass of wine to my mission? Surely, Fortuné, that child is a nuisance, and must be asleep by now?"

For Anne-Hilarion, huddled in the tablecloth, was lying as still as a dormouse, and no longer sitting upright against his friend's breast, trying to follow the conversation.

"I will take him to bed," announced the émigré, without giving an opinion on the Comte de Flavigny's condition. "You permit, René?"

(2)

But as the Chouan was replacing him under the parrots and humming-birds, Anne-Hilarion murmured sleepily, "I am glad that Papa is not going to fetch the King's daughter; but if he is going to this place—Ver . . . Verona, will you not come and see me, M. le Chevalier, while he is away?"

"But I am going away too, in a few days," replied his friend. "To Jersey, and then to France."

"Then will you come and say good-bye to me?"

"Yes, I will do that," assented the émigré. "Now go to sleep. Good-night, my little cabbage."

Then he too went quickly and quietly out of the room, for neither had he any desire that the justly scandalised and incensed Elspeth should fall upon him. But, alas, the dragon was standing outside the door.

"Eh, sirs!" she ejaculated at sight of him. "'Tis easy tae see ye hae nae childer o' yer ain! Tae tak' yon bairn oot o' his bed at sic a time o' nicht!"

M. de la Vireville might have retorted that not only was he innocent of this crime, but that he had, on the contrary, restored the wanderer—though not instantly—to that refuge. Also, had he but known, it was Elspeth, with her rendering of a too-suggestive tale, who had been at the bottom of Anne's exploit, and was therefore, partly at least, responsible for the consequences which were to follow it. But, being French and not Scotch, he had never heard of Sir Patrick Spens, and could not claim second-sight. He set up a weak defence by observing that the Marquis knew of the occurrence.

"Indeed, it's a verra gude thing for the bairn that his father *is* gaein' awa," retorted Elspeth instantly. "'Tis bad eno' wi' Glenauchtie himsel'" (thus she preferred to speak of Mr. Elphinstone), "but when there's twa puir misguidit bodies tae——"

La Vireville, who was already a step or two down the staircase, stopped suddenly.

"How do you know that the Marquis is going away?"

"And hoo should we not ken it, sir?" demanded she, stiffening. "'Tis common news amangst us in the hoose."

"Indeed? Then, as M. de Flavigny himself has only known it for the last quarter of an hour or so, I

should recommend you, Mrs. Saunders, to quell this gift of prophecy in your fellow-servants. Above all, see that it is confined to the house. Do you understand ? "

And the Frenchman ran downstairs again, a little frown on his forehead, leaving Elspeth petrified with indignation on the landing.

(3)

Down in the hall de Flavigny was speeding the last of his guests. The Chouan went back into the deserted dining-room to wait for him. Standing in front of Janet de Flavigny's picture he looked up at her. He had never seen her in life, for his friendship with her husband was only some two years old, and owed its rapid growth partly, no doubt, to just the right amount of dissimilarity of character between them. Of tougher fibre than his friend, and of a disposition less openly sensitive, Fortuné de la Vireville, who had known more than his share of knocking about the world, had something of an elder brother's protective attitude towards him, though de Flavigny was only three years younger than himself. It was this which was causing him to wait for the Marquis now.

" Shut the door a moment, René, will you," he said, as his friend came back. " How is it that the domestics seem to know so much about your future movements ? Mrs. Saunders has just considerably surprised me by telling me that you are going away."

The Marquis looked at him and bit his lip. " I suppose," he said, after a moment, " that I must have said something to Baptiste about preparing my valise in case I went. But Baptiste, of course, is above suspicion."

" Granted. But he repeated that order, not unnaturally perhaps, to the other servants."

" There is no great harm in that," replied de

Flavigny, with a smile. "It is not a piece of information of much interest to anyone outside the house, and is not therefore likely to be conveyed elsewhere."

"Ah, pardon me, mon ami," interposed the Chevalier de la Vireville quickly, "you underrate your importance. There are people who would find it quite interesting if they knew of it—our dear compatriots of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris, for instance. And they have spies in the most unlikely places."

"But not in this house," said René, throwing himself into a chair.

"Perhaps not," agreed his friend. "I should certainly not suspect Elspeth or that Indian of M. votre beau-père of selling information. As to the others, I do not know."

M. de Flavigny was perfectly right; there was no spy in Mr. Elphinstone's house at the moment. He did not know that the unsatisfactoriness of the destitute French lad, whom Mr. Elphinstone (out of the kindness of his heart and on Baptiste's suggestion) had seen fit to engage for some obscure minor office in the kitchen regions, had that day reached such a culminating point as to lead to his summary dismissal, and that he was at that very moment preparing to carry his unsatisfactoriness and other useful possessions—including a torn-up letter in de Flavigny's handwriting—to some destination unknown.

CHAPTER III

Purchase of a Goldfish, and other Important Matters

(I)

Four days later Mr. Elphinstone and his grandson were breakfasting alone in the room where Anne-Hilarion had remained, so unsuitably attired, to hear matters not primarily intended for the ears of little boys. And now the Comte de Flavigny was seated again at that very table, his legs dangling, eating his porridge, not with any great appetite, but because it was commanded him.

And Mr. Elphinstone did the same, glancing across now and again with his kind blue eyes to observe his grandson's progress. The suns of India, where so much of his life had been passed, had done little more than fade his apple cheeks to a complexion somewhat less sanguine than would have been theirs under Scottish skies. His very precise British attire bore no traces of his long sojourn in the East, save that the brooch in the lace at his throat was of Oriental workmanship, and that the pigeon's-blood ruby on his finger had an exotic look—and an equally exotic history. Anne-Hilarion knew that it had been given by a rajah to his grandfather, instead of an elephant, and never ceased to regret so disastrous a preference.

If James Elphinstone had known, when he left India, that in years to come an elephant would be so

fervently desired in Cavendish Square, it is possible that he might have considered the bringing of one with him, such was his attitude (justly condemned by Mrs. Saunders) towards Janet's child. At this moment, in fact, he was meditating some extra little pleasure for Anne-Hilarion, to make up for his father's departure of two days ago. M. le Comte, though he had a certain philosophical turn of mind of his own, fretted a good deal after M. le Marquis, and his grandfather was wondering whether to assign to that cause the very slow rate at which his porridge was disappearing this morning.

"Come, child, I shall be finished long before you," he observed at last.

Anne-Hilarion sighed, and, addressing himself once more to the fray, made great play with his spoon, finally announcing, in true Scots phrase, that he had finished 'them.'

"That's right," said the old gentleman. "Some more milk, my bairn? Bring your cup."

Anne slipped down and presented his mug. "I think we were going out this morning, Grandpapa," he observed, with his little engaging air, watching the filling of the receptacle.

"So we were, my lamb. And we were going to buy something. What was it?"

"A goldfish," whispered the little boy. "A goldfish!" He gave his grandfather's arm a sudden ecstatic squeeze, and climbed back to his place.

"To be sure, a goldfish," was beginning Mr. Elphinstone, when at that moment in came a letter, brought by Lal Khan, the dusky, turbaned bearer—source, once, of much infantile terror to M. le Comte, but now one of his greatest friends. On him Anne-Hilarion bestowed, ere he salaamed himself out again, one of his sudden smiles. Mr. Elphinstone, after hunting vainly for his spectacles, opened the letter. It drew from him an exclamation.

"Here's actually a letter from your father already,

Anne. He has written from Canterbury, on his way to Dover."

Above the milk he was drinking, Anne-Hilarion's dark, rather solemn eyes were fixed on his grandfather.

"Dear me, this is very curious," said Mr. Elphinstone, looking up from the perusal of the letter. "Your father finds, he says, that some old friends of his family are living there—at Canterbury, that is—two old French ladies. What's the name? . . . de Chaulnes—Madame and Mademoiselle de Chaulnes. He came across them quite by chance, it appears. And—I wonder what you will say to this, Anne—he wants you to go and stay with them for a few days."

"Now?" asked the little boy.

"Yes, quite soon. They are very anxious to see you, having known your grandparents in France. There is a letter from them enclosed in your Papa's. I am to send you with Elspeth. See, I will read you Madame de Chaulnes' letter."

And he read it out to his grandson, in its original French, a tongue which he spoke well, though with a Scottish flavouring.

"'MONSIEUR,—It has been, as you may well imagine, a pleasure as great as it was unexpected to encounter, in his passage through Canterbury to-day—on his way to a destination as to which prudence invites silence—the son of my old friend Mme. de Flavigny. From his lips I have learnt of his marriage—of so short a duration, alas!—with your beautiful daughter, in whose untimely grave one sees that so much of his heart is buried; and also of the existence of the dear little boy who remains to him as a pledge of their love.

"'I do not know, Monsieur, if René—I can scarcely bring myself to call him anything else—has ever spoken to you of my sister-in-law and myself, and our old friendship with his family.'"—"I do seem to remember his mentioning the name," observed Mr.

Elphinstone, fingering his chin.—" ' It is possible that he has done so, and that this fact, joined to the letter which he was good enough to write to accompany this, may move you to a favourable reception of my request, which is, that some day, before the weather becomes unpleasantly hot for travel, you should allow the little boy and his nurse, Mrs. Saunders, to pay us a few days' visit here at Canterbury. Perhaps, indeed, if I might suggest such a thing, this would serve to distract him during his father's absence. Our modest dwelling boasts a garden of fair size, and my sister and myself are both devoted to children. You, Monsieur, from what we hear of your charities to us unfortunate exiles, will well understand what the sight of the grandchild of our departed friends would mean to two old women, and it is this conviction which emboldens me to make a request which I know to be no light one.

" ' I have the honour to remain, Monsieur, your obedient servant,

" ' BARONNE DE CHAULNES.' "

Mr. Elphinstone reflected. " I shall not like parting with you, child," he murmured, half to himself. " Not at all, not at all. But I suppose if René wishes it, as he obviously does . . . And it is not far to Canterbury. Shall you like to go and visit these old French ladies, Anne ? "

" I do not know," replied the Comte de Flavigny, considering. " You are not coming too, Grandpapa ? "

" No, no. But Elspeth will be with you."

" Perhaps I shall like it. Have they a dog, ces dames, des chats ? "

" Cats, very probably. But I do not know. I think you will find it interesting, Anne, for a few days. You will be able to play in the garden there. These old ladies " —he referred once more to the letter— " Mme. de Chaulnes and her sister-in-law, can tell you, I

expect, all about your father when he was a little boy like you."

"Yes," assented the prospective visitor in tones of resignation rather than of anticipation. "But——" He looked mournful.

"Yes, my bairn?"

"The goldfish!"

Mr. Elphinstone laughed. "Oh, the goldfish! That is easily arranged. We will go out directly after breakfast and buy it, while Elspeth is packing."

"I could take it with me?"

"Well, I don't know. . . . Yes, I suppose you could."

Anne fell into meditation on the goldfish. He evidently saw it swimming before him, and the idea of parting so soon from this treasure, not yet even acquired, was clearly distressing.

"Then, if I could take it, Grandpapa, perhaps I would not mind very much, as Papa wishes it."

"That's a good child!" exclaimed Mr. Elphinstone, relieved. Not that Anne-Hilarion was, as a rule, anything else but good, yet, as he was very sensitive and his grandfather ridiculously tender-hearted, the old man dreaded even the remotest shadow of a difference of opinion. "It will only be for a few days," he went on, "and I think you had better go at once, this afternoon, in fact, so that you will get back all the earlier, in case Papa should return from Italy sooner than we expect."

This he said with a view of heartening his grandson, well knowing that the term of 'a few days,' elastic as it was, could hardly see René back from Verona.

(2)

But if Anne-Hilarion was resigned, Mrs. Saunders received the news of the proposed expedition in a manner indicative of the highest disapproval. Such a

plan was, she declared, against sense and nature; she could not imagine what the Marquis was thinking of. He must be clean daft. No one but a man would have conceived of such a scheme. She supposed that was the way they did things in France. Fifty odd miles to Canterbury—seven hours at the very least; the bairn would take his death of fatigue; and here was Glenauchtie proposing that they should start that very afternoon! She was a little mollified, but not greatly, on hearing that they were only to go as far as Rochester that day, and sleep there, continuing their journey next morning.

But 'Glenauchtie,' for all his gentleness, was always obeyed, and Elspeth packed her charge's 'duds' and her own that morning with considerable promptitude in spite of her protestations.

Meanwhile Mr. Elphinstone, after writing a letter to Anne's hostesses, which he dispatched direct to Canterbury, and sending a servant to take two places in the afternoon stage-coach to Rochester, set out with his grandson to buy the promised goldfish. It proved to be a transaction which took time, because Anne found it difficult to make up his mind between two similarly priced fishes, one of which, though larger than the other, was not of so good a colour. As he remarked, in a tone of puzzled reproach, the gold was coming off, and this disillusioning fact caused him to put to the shopman, in his clear, precise, and oddly stressed English, many searching questions on what further sorrowful transformations of the sort might be expected in any fish he bought. Finally the smaller and more perfect fish was selected, and they left the little shop, Anne carrying his purchase very carefully by a piece of string tied round the top of its glass bowl.

"Will it be lonely, Grandpapa? Do you think we ought to have bought two?" he suggested, as he trotted along by Mr. Elphinstone's side, all his energies directed to keeping the water steady.

"There would hardly be room for two in there,

child. Perhaps when you come back from Canterbury we might get another, and have them both in a larger bowl. But the present is best for travelling purposes."

"Yes, perhaps it is best to have only one goldfish. Last year, when I had tadpoles, they ate one another —you remember, Grandpapa? This goldfish could not eat *itself*, could it, Grandpapa?"

"I should hardly think it possible," replied Mr. Elphinstone gravely.

"I shall be able to show it to M. le Chevalier," observed the little boy happily, holding up the bowl and surveying the swinging captive. "—Oh, Grandpapa, but perhaps I shall not see him! He promised to come and say good-bye to me, but when he comes I shall be gone to Canterbury, and when I return from those ladies he will have gone away to Jersey. Oh, Grandpapa, isn't that sad!"

15940

CHAPTER IV

Visit to two Fairy Godmothers

(I)

The coach ride to Rochester, the night's stay there, and the journey on to Canterbury through the fine April weather had been all delight to Anne-Hilarion. And now he was being helped down at the gate of the dearest little garden, surrounding the dearest little house, and walking, with his hand in Elspeth's, up a cobbled path between wallflowers and forget-me-nots to a little green-painted door with shining handle, under a portico with fluted pillars. This door opened, and inside, in a small panelled entrance hall that was also a room, stood a veritable fairy godmother of an old lady, leaning, as a fairy godmother should, on a black and silver stick with a crooked handle. She had, moreover, black lace mittens on her hands, a cap of fine lace on her silver hair, and, under the cap, just such a face as a fairy godmother might have, even to the delicately-cut hooked nose and bright blue eyes.

"Welcome, welcome, my child!" said she in French, stooping—but not much, for she was little herself—and kissing the boy. A faint, delicious scent came out of her grey silk dress. "I hope you are not tired, my dear? And this is your attendant. What is your name, if you please?—no, I know it; Mrs. Saunders, is it not?"

The dragon curtsied—Elspeth's curtsy, which could

express many things, but seldom what a curtsy is supposed to indicate.

"Doubtless you have some baggage," said Mme. de Chaulnes—if this were she. "Ask the driver to set it down by the gate, and presently we will find some passer-by to bring it in, for we are only women here. Now, my child—Anne, that is your name, is it not?—here is my sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Angèle de Chaulnes, waiting to make your acquaintance."

Anne then perceived that it was a second fairy godmother who had opened the door to them. She too was small and exquisitely dressed, in lavender silk, but she held no stick, seemed younger than the other (but for all that, to a child's eye, phenomenally aged), and had a face which, lacking Mme. de Chaulnes' fine aquiline features, was, to Anne's mind, more 'comfortable.'

"The little darling!" she murmured as she kissed him. "And what have you there—a goldfish?" For all the time Anne-Hilarion was carefully holding his glass bowl by the string.

After that, Elspeth having arranged about the baggage, they went upstairs into a spotless little bedroom smelling of lavender.

"I am very sorry," said the elder of the old ladies, addressing herself to Elspeth, "that there is not a bed for you in the house. You see, our establishment is very small. But we have arranged for you to sleep at a house a few minutes away, where there is a good woman who will make you very comfortable. You can put the little boy to bed before retiring there, and, of course, come and dress him in the morning, if he requires it."

Elspeth looked mutinous, and her mouth took on a line which Anne-Hilarion knew very well.

"A'm thinkin', Mem," she replied, "it wad be best for me tae hae a wee bit bed in here."

Mme. de Chaulnes shook her head. "I am afraid," she said, with equal pleasantness and firm-

ness, "that that arrangement would not suit us at all." And there was nothing for it but acquiescence.

"See, here is a good place to put your goldfish," said Mlle. Angèle meanwhile to Anne-Hilarion. "And then, when she has washed your face and hands for you, mon chéri, your nurse will bring you downstairs, and you shall have something to eat, for I am sure you must be hungry after your journey."

(2)

Dwellers in Canterbury were well accustomed to the two old French ladies who lived so retired and so refined a life in the little brick house with the portico; indeed the dames of that ancient city took a sympathetic interest in the exiles. Those who were on visiting terms with them spoke many a laudatory word of the interior of Rose Cottage—of its exquisite neatness and elegance, of the superior china and the spotless napery. But the number of ladies in a position to pronounce these encomiums was limited, for Mme. and Mlle. de Chaulnes entertained not at all in the regular sense of the word. Yet, for all their modest manner of life, they were not penurious; rather was it noised abroad that they gave largely of their substance to their needy fellow-countrymen of their own convictions—for, of course, they were Royalists themselves and of noble birth. Hence, if any émigré were stranded on the Dover road in the neighbourhood of Canterbury it was usual—if the speaker's command of French were sufficient—to direct him to these charitable compatriots. Often, indeed, refugees were to be found staying for a few days at Rose Cottage.

Rumour had endowed the French ladies with a moving and tragic past. Over Mme. de Chaulnes' mantelpiece hung a small portrait in oils of a gentleman in uniform—to be precise, that of a Garde Française

of the fifties, but nobody knew that—and the story went that this was her husband, the brother of Mlle. Angèle, who had either been (1) guillotined, or (2) slain in the defence of the Tuileries on the 10th of August 1792, or (3) killed in the prison massacres in the September of the same year. No one, not even the boldest canon's wife, had dared to ask Mme. de Chaulnes which of these theories might claim authentic circulation; no one, in fact, had even ventured to inquire if the gentleman in uniform *was* her husband. For, though so small and gentle, she 'had an air about her' which was far from displeasing the ladies of the Close and elsewhere; they were, on the contrary, rather proud of knowing the possessor of it.

(3)

Not many hours later, Anne-Hilarion, fed and reposed (for, as each old lady said to the other, he must not be overtired), was seated on a small chair in front of a cheerful little fire in the hall, chattering gaily to the two fairy godmothers who knitted on either side of the hearth. He was never inordinately shy with strangers, and, the first encounter over, he was probably much happier than was Elspeth in the company of the old Frenchwoman in the kitchen. He related to them every detail of his journey, while the old grey cat on the rug, with tucked-in paws, blinked her eyes sleepily at the unfamiliar treble. And Mme. de Chaulnes told him about the cat, and how she had once brought up a family of orphaned kittens, and Mlle. Angèle was much interested in his goldfish, though as yet there was hardly any history to relate of that acquisition.

"Your Papa has not seen it yet, then?" inquired Mme. de Chaulnes, having listened to the whole narrative of its purchase.

"No," replied Anne-Hilarion. "It is to be a

surprise for him when he comes back." He pulled himself suddenly higher in the chair, which was a trifle slippery. "Did you know my Papa when he was little, like me, Madame? Grandpapa said so."

Mme. de Chaulnes laid down her knitting. "Cher petit, yes. I saw your Papa first when he was about your age, playing in the garden of the château in France where you were afterwards born, Anne. He was playing with a ball near a stone basin full of water, and—is not this curious?—there were goldfish like yours swimming about in the water. I remember it after all these years." And Mme. de Chaulnes' keen old eyes grew dreamy.

"Sister," said Mlle. Angèle, "tell the child how René was lost."

"Ah yes," said Mme. de Chaulnes. "Only I hope Anne will never imitate such conduct. Your father, as he grew older, Anne, was very fond of reading. One day his father—your grandfather, Anne, your French grandfather, that is—had given him a new book (I forget what it was), and your father was so delighted with it that he wandered off and took it to read in an old quarry. You know what that is, Anne—a place where they get stone from. So René—your father—scrambled down into this quarry, and sat there to read, and he was so much interested in the book that he forgot about dinner. And at the château they were very anxious because they did not know where he had got to, and the afternoon went on and still he did not come, and then at last they sent out to look for him. And how do you think they found him, Anne?"

But Anne could not guess.

"They took a big dog that belonged to the Marquis, your grandfather, and gave him a coat of your father's to smell, and told him to find your father. So the big dog trotted off, smelling the ground all the way, and at last he led them to the stone quarry, and there was René at the bottom of it. He could not climb up again!"

"He must have been frightened, Papa," said Anne reflectively. "I could not have read so long as that. When the words have many letters it is tiring, especially if the book is English. Do you speak English, Mesdames?" For all their converse hitherto had naturally been conducted in French, and Anne had forgotten that Elspeth had been addressed in her native tongue.

"A little," said Mme. de Chaulnes, smiling. "But you, child, speak it as easily as French, no doubt."

"I speak English to Grandpapa, and French to Papa," replied the linguist. "Did my Papa have a pony when he was little?" he next inquired.

"I do not remember," said the old lady. "Have you one, Anne?"

"Not yet," responded Anne-Hilarion. "Grandpapa has promised me one when I shall be seven."

"Your Grandpapa is very good to you, I think," commented Mlle. Angèle.

"Yes, indeed," agreed the child. "Papa says that he spoils me."

"I expect he does," said Mme. de Chaulnes, smiling at him over the top of her tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles.

A little silence fell. The two old ladies knitted on; the grey cat stretched herself. There hung over the mantelpiece a head of the late Louis XVI., an engraving of no particular merit, having the similitude of a bust, and Mlle. Angèle, looking up, found their visitor studying that full, petulant profile.

"You know who that is, of course, mon petit? The King—the late King, whose head they cut off."

Anne-Hilarion nodded. "M. le Chevalier has a picture of the Queen too, on a snuff-box. He showed it to me one day."

Mlle. Angèle rose and took something from the mantelpiece. It was a miniature of a little boy in general appearance not unlike Anne himself, but fairer, with falling curls and a deep ruffle. "Do you

know who that is, child ? " she asked, in a voice gone suddenly sad.

Anne did know.

" He is in prison, the little King, and can't get out," he replied gravely. " ' *Domine, salvum fac regem !* ' M. l'Abbé taught me to say that—it is Latin," he added, not without pride.

" You have learned friends, little one," observed Mme. de Chaulnes kindly.

" Yes," replied the child, with interest. " M. l'Abbé knows a great many things. He teaches French also—but that is because he has not much money, I think. And M. le Vicomte de Soucy, he is very poor ; Grandpapa thinks that he often goes without his dinner. But he is very proud too ; he will not dine at our house often."

" He might make some money by selling his snuff-box with the picture of the Queen," suggested Mme. de Chaulnes, with rather a sad smile. " But I dare say he would sooner starve than do that."

" Oh, but it is not *he* who has the snuff-box," corrected Anne-Hilarion. " It is M. le Chevalier de la Vireville."

" But no doubt M. le Chevalier is poor too—like all the rest of us," said the old lady, sighing.

Anne-Hilarion considered this supposition about M. le Chevalier. Having no definite standard of wealth except the seldom seen contents of his own money-box, he only knew that M. de Soucy and the Abbé and the rest were poor because he had heard Mr. Elphinstone and his father say so. He had never seriously weighed M. le Chevalier's financial condition, yet, remembering now that on several occasions M. de la Vireville had contributed to the money-box in question, he was inclined to dispute this judgment.

" I do not know about M. le Chevalier," he said at length. " You see, he does not live in London ; he is only there sometimes. It is more interesting for him, because he is a great deal in Brittany, and he

fights, and goes to Jersey. He is going there soon. That is more amusing than teaching French like M. l'Abbé, or music, which I think is what M. le Vicomte teaches."

"Much more amusing," agreed Mme. de Chaulnes. "Why then does not M. le Vicomte do something of the same sort as M. le Chevalier? If I were a man, Anne, instead of an old woman, I am sure I should set off to Brittany to fight for the little King."

"I think the reason why M. de Soucy does not go to fight is because he is lame. It is a pity. It is from a wound."

"Then he might do the same sort of thing as your Papa," suggested Mlle. de Chaulnes, "and go abroad to see the Princes, and so on."

"Indeed," said Anne rather wistfully, "I wish M. le Vicomte could have gone to Verona instead of Papa. But they all wanted Papa to go."

"They had a meeting to settle it, of course," said Mme. de Chaulnes, as one stating a fact rather than asking a question.

"Yes," said Anne, nodding. "In our house."

"Your Papa told you all about it afterwards, I suppose?"

"No," replied the Comte de Flavigny sedately; "I was there."

"You, child!" exclaimed Mme. de Chaulnes incredulously. "Nonsense!"

"But yes!" persisted Anne, wriggling on his chair. "You see, it was in the dining-room, and I got out of bed and went down, because I thought they were going to Noroway-over-the-foam, as it says in the poem, and M. le Chevalier wrapped me up in the tablecloth and took me on his knee, and I heard all about it. Elspeth was dreadfully angry next morning," he concluded.

"I don't wonder!" was Mme. de Chaulnes' comment. "Fancy a boy of your age up at that time of night. You know, Anne," she went on seriously, "you must be careful how you talk about what you heard at that

meeting—if you were really awake and heard anything. You must not speak of such things except to your father's friends. But I expect you know that, my child, don't you ? "

Anne-Hilarion had flushed up. " But yes, Madame," he replied earnestly. " Papa has told me that often, not to be a chatterbox. But I did not really understand what they were talking about, except that Papa was to go to see the Regent—I do not know why—and that there was soon to be an expedition to France."

One of Mlle. Angèle's knitting-needles here dropped with a clatter on to the polished floor.

" Oh, there is no harm in talking about that," said Mme. de Chaulnes placidly. " That is common property—the news of the coming expedition. (Yes, sit upon the rug, child, by the cat, if you are tired of the chair.) You see, all we Royalists are interested in the expedition, and know about it, even the place where it is going to land. Angèle, if it is your knitting-needle that you are looking for, it has rolled just by your foot."

" I heard where the expedition was going to land," said Anne, with some excitement, as he slipped down beside the cat. " But I have forgotten it again."

He looked inquiringly up at the old lady. Mme. de Chaulnes threw him a quizzical glance.

" A very good thing too," she said, knitting rapidly. " I am not going to revive your memory, child. It is a mercy that children have short ones, if they are going to make a practice of attending consultations that should be secret," she remarked across the hearth to her sister.

" I do not know that they are so short," said Mlle. Angèle, recapturing her needle. " I will wager you a crown, sister, that before he leaves us Anne remembers the name of the place where the expedition is to land."

" Very good," said her sister-in-law. " But I do not think that he will."

"Or better still," went on the younger fairy godmother, "let us wager with Anne himself that he does not remember it, and is not able to tell us before he leaves us. Then, if he does, he will have the crown to put into his money-box—for I expect he has a money-box of his own."

"Oh yes, indeed I have," said the little boy. He suddenly became silent, gently stroking the grey fur to his hand. Mme. de Chaulnes finished turning the heel of her stocking.

"Well, what are you thinking of, child?" she asked at length, resuming her fourth needle.

"I was remembering that there was something I wanted to ask M. le Chevalier when he came to say good-bye to me before going to Jersey; but now when he comes to our house for that, he will find that I came away here first, so I cannot ask him."

Mme. de Chaulnes put down her knitting. "So he was going to say good-bye to you before leaving for Jersey, was he? He is a great friend of yours, then, this M. de la Vireville?"

"I like him very much," responded the Comte de Flavigny with precision.

"Well, what did you want to ask him? Perhaps I can tell you the answer."

"I wanted very much to know," said Anne slowly, "why he has two names?"

Mme. de Chaulnes raised her eyebrows. "Has he then two?"

"Oh yes," exclaimed the child. "At the meeting I heard them call him 'Monsieur Augustin,' and I wondered why, because I know it is not one of his noms de baptême."

Mlle. Angèle made a strange gesture with her little mittened hands. Mme. de Chaulnes frowned at her.

"That is quite simple, mon petit; at least, I think so," she said, looking down at Anne's upturned visage, rather flushed by the proximity of the fire. 'Monsieur Augustin' is a nom de guerre, and it is the name of

one of the Chouan leaders—you know who the Chouans are, who fight for the King in Brittany? So that your M. de la Vireville and 'Monsieur Augustin' must be one and the same person. He is tall and dark, and has a scar on his cheek, has he not, M. le Chevalier?"

"Yes," said Anne. "Yes, there is a mark there Oh, do you know him?"

"No," said Mme. de Chaulnes, "but I have heard of him. And your Chevalier will be 'Monsieur Augustin.' Well, that is the answer to your question, and you see it is quite simple. Now, do you not think it is time for you to go to bed, Anne? First, however, I think you should write a little letter to Grandpapa—quite a short letter, to say that you have arrived safely. Do you not think that would please him?"

And Anne, assenting, was shortly installed at an escritoire, where, perched upon a chair heightened by a cushion, he slowly and laboriously penned a brief epistle to Mr. Elphinstone. And at the table in the middle of the little hall Mme. de Chaulnes was writing too.

CHAPTER V

THOMAS THE RHYMER

(I)

ELSPETH was very glum as she put the little boy to bed in the delightful room where there was no place for her.

"At ony rate," she remarked, when the operation was concluded, "A'll no leave ye till A please, and gif ane of these madams comes A'll e'en gar her turn me oot."

"They are very kind ladies," said Anne-Hilarion, who was excited. "I think Mme. de Chaulnes is a beautiful old lady like a fée marraine—yes, like the Queen of Elfland. Elspeth, say the 'Queen of Elfland'!" he added coaxingly.

And, much more because she thought it would enable her to stay longer in her charge's room than to please him, Elspeth embarked on the tale of 'True Thomas,' which she had proffered in vain in London a few nights ago. Her favourite passage was rendered with even more emphasis than usual:

"'O see ye not yon narrrow road,
So thick beset wi' thorns and briers?
That is the Path of Righteousness,
Though after it but few enquires.

'And see ye not yon braid braid road,
That lies across the lily leven?
That is the Path of Wickedness,
Though some call it the Road to Heaven.

'And see ye not yon bonny road,
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.'"

"This is Elfland, then," put in Anne-Hilarion contentedly.

"'But, Thomas, ye sall haud yer tongue
Whatever ye may hear or see;
For speak ye word in Elflyn-land,
Ye'll ne'er win back to your ain countrie.'"

She paused a second. "Go on!" commanded Anne-Hilarion.

"'Syne they came to a garden green,
And she pu'd an apple——'"

"You have missed some out!" exclaimed the listener. "Do not miss any, Elspeth! Say about the rivers abune the knee and all the blood that's shed on the earth——"

"Fie, Maister Anne!" said Mrs. Saunders reprovingly. "Yon verses are no' fittin' for a bairn, and A did wrang ever tae tell them tae ye." However, to get them over as quickly as possible, she went back and repeated them.

"'O they rade on and farther on,
And they waded rivers abune the knee;
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.'"

"I like that!" murmured the Comte de Flavigny, with a shudder.

"'It was mirk, mirk night, there was nae starlight,
They waded through red blude to the knee;
For a' the blude that's shed on the earth
Rins through the springs o' that countrie.'"

"But what does that mean?" asked the child, captured by a delicious horror. "How could——"

"It's a' silly havers, child—it's poetry, and nae

sense in it," replied Elspeth crossly. "Noo harken aboot the apple.

'Syne they came to a garden green——'"

But at the second attempt to pluck the apple the door opened and Mlle. Angèle came in.

"My sister desires that you will go now," she said to Elspeth. "Mrs. Barnes is waiting to take you to her house. We shall expect you to-morrow morning at seven o'clock."

Though she had a pleasant smile on her face there was no resisting the quiet authority of her tone. Mrs. Saunders rose with much reluctance, bent over her charge and gave him a kiss—by no means the ritual of every night—and with a very high head left the room. Mlle. de Chaulnes came over to the bed.

"Are you comfortable, little one?" she asked kindly. "You will not be frightened? My sister sleeps next door, and if you want anything, you have only to call her."

"Yes, thank you, Madame," said Anne-Hilarion a little shyly, and she too kissed him and went away.

(2)

But the mere absence of alarm is not in itself sufficient to induce sleep. M. le Comte de Flavigny had seen too much that day for ready slumber, and now he began to see it all over again: the busy road from Rochester, the stage-coach and its passengers—the fat traveller in a shawl, the thin one who had, to Elspeth's intense indignation, offered him a sip of rum—and everything in Rose Cottage, down to the grey cat. The last object of which he thought was his goldfish, on the dressing-table, for just as he was making up his mind to get up and look at it, he fell fast asleep.

In his sleep he had a curious dream. He was in a

little boat on the sea, he and a lady with a crown on her head. By that he knew that she was the Queen of Elfland, though she had not, as the ballad said, a skirt of grass-green silk and a velvet mantle, and he wondered why she was in a boat, and what she had done with her horse and all its silver bells. Then suddenly she changed to Mme. de Chaulnes, and, bending over him where he lay in the boat, shook him slightly and said, "Anne, Anne, do you remember now the name of the place at which the expedition was to land?" And he tried hard to remember it, while the boat rocked under him and the water was full of goldfish, but all that he could recall was the name of the shop where the goldfish had been bought yesterday—Hardman. "Think!" said the Queen. "Are you sure you cannot remember it?" Then the sea began to get very rough and dark, and Anne saw that on it were floating feather-beds and shoes with cork heels, as it said in 'Noroway-over-the-foam,' and so he looked over the side of the boat, and down, very far down at the bottom, he could see Sir Patrick Spens lying drowned on the seaweed, with a great many other people . . . and somehow Sir Patrick Spens was also M. le Chevalier de la Vireville. And as he looked he became aware that in some way it was his, Anne-Hilarion's, fault that they were all drowned—or at least that it would be his fault if he did something or other, but the dreadful thing was that he could not find out what that something was which he must avoid. And the Queen—or Mme. de Chaulnes—who was still in the boat, said, laughing:

> "'Speak ye word in Elflyn-land
> Ye'll ne'er win back to your ain countrie,'"

and then he understood—he *had* spoken, and that was why M. le Chevalier and all the rest were down at the bottom of the sea. And he began to cry bitterly, begging M. le Chevalier not to be drowned; and

because he was so unhappy and so sorry he said boldly to the lady, " No, I cannot remember the name of the place, and if I could I would not tell you ! " But with that he woke, and found himself, not in a boat, but in his own bed.

It was still dark, and the light was burning, and there was no one in the room. But as he looked anxiously to be sure that this was the case,—anxiously and a little dimly, for there were real tears in his eyes, —he heard the door very gently close.

And that, joined to his dream, really terrified Anne-Hilarion, so that he took instinctively to the natural refuge of those of tender years oppressed with terrors in the night, and burying his head under the clothes, lay there quaking with fear, his heart thudding like a live thing in his small body. Who had gone out— or who . . . what . . . had come in ? What was in the room with him ? . . .

A long, long time passed ; it was difficult to breathe under the clothes, and he was hot and cold alternately with fear. But nothing happened ; no animal leapt on to the bed, no spectral hand shook him by the shoulder. He remembered how Papa had told him that he need never be frightened of anything unless he were doing wrong ; that the angels were there to take care of him, though he could not see them. So, a little wondering whether it would penetrate through the bedclothes, he put up a small prayer for protection to his own guardian angel, and, finding some solace in this effort, ventured after a while cautiously to remove some blanket and peep out. And he found, to his inexpressible joy, that while he had been thus concealed a miracle had happened—doubtless due to his orisons—and that shafts of the dawn were making their way round the window-curtains. So night was nearly over, and it would soon be the blessed day.

The next thing that happened was the sun peering in and waking him. Anne-Hilarion got up immediately to look at his goldfish, and wondered if it had been

swimming round and round tirelessly all the time in the dark. In these speculations he forgot the terrors of the night and was comforted, though when Elspeth came to dress him he looked rather pale and tired, and did not trouble her, as he sometimes did, by skipping about during his toilet. It was against Mrs. Saunders' principles to 'cocker' him by asking him, even on an unusual occasion, if he had had a good night, and so she made no inquiries. Perhaps it was as well, for already the memory of the actual dream was beginning to fade.

The Comte de Flavigny breakfasted downstairs with the old ladies, who had conformed in this respect to English custom, then he played for a while in the garden with the fat grey cat, who would not, indeed, play in the proper sense of the word, looking without any interest at a piece of string when it was dangled before her, but who was very willing to be stroked, and followed him round, purring and rubbing herself against his legs. But he was uneasy in his mind because of the goldfish, whose bowl he had caused Elspeth to hang on the branch of a tree, tormenting her with inquiries as to whether the cat could jump so high, or crawl out so far, till Elspeth at last crossly said, "Why didna ye leave the fush bide in yer bedroom, child?" To which Anne-Hilarion responded, with a sudden little dignity that he had at times, "Because I do not wish to, and because I mean always to have it with me, *always*, Elspeth!" But then there came a sudden April shower, and he and his 'fush' had to be conveyed indoors again.

When Anne got into the house, he found a gentleman talking in the hall to the two old ladies. They all turned round at his entrance.

"Etienne, this is our little visitor," said Mme. de Chaulnes. "Anne, this is an old friend of ours, M. du Châtel, who is an émigré, like your father."

Anne put his hand into M. du Châtel's, thinking that he could hardly be an old friend of the fairy god-

mothers; he looked so much younger than they. M. du Châtel was neatly dressed in black, and he had also very black hair; there was about him nothing remarkable save his particularly light eyes, which, besides looking strange under so dark a thatch, reminded Anne of a goat he had once seen.

It soon appeared that the émigré had come on a visit and was staying the night.

"Then A'd like fine tae ken," said Elspeth indignantly, when she had gathered this piece of information, "hoo it comes that these madams hae a room for him in their hoose and nane for me!" And she brushed Anne-Hilarion's hair as though he were responsible for it, while he, wincing, assured her that he did not know why.

"Mebbe," communed Mrs. Saunders, "they kenned he was comin', and keepit the room for him. Aweel, it's nane o' ma business, nae doot, and A canna get a worrd oot o' that auld witch in the kitchen, but A'll see yon room, or ma name's no' Elspeth Saunders."

And see it she did, at three o'clock that afternoon, when the inmates of Rose Cottage and their visitors were at dinner. She was in no wise rewarded for her investigation of the small apartment—so small, indeed, as hardly to be more than a cupboard—except by the fact, which puzzled her, that the guest who had already occupied it for some hours had made not the least attempt to unpack his little valise. It stood untouched on a chair by the bed, and if Elspeth had pursued her researches a little further she would have made a discovery of real interest—that the bed prepared by those very particular old ladies for M. du Châtel's repose had no sheets on it.

(3)

Downstairs, at the same time, the newcomer was being most friendly and agreeable to Anne-Hilarion

over the roast lamb and salad, and suggesting that his little compatriot might like to see something of Canterbury if ces dames would permit, and that, with their approval, he would take him that afternoon to see the great Cathedral, in whose crypt French people—though, to be sure, Huguenots—had worshipped for over a hundred years. Anne replied, politely as ever, but without enthusiasm, that he should be very pleased to accompany him. He was not drawn to M. du Châtel of the goat's eyes. Nor, as he wandered with him later in that lofty nave, was he at all communicative, as he had been to the old ladies on the previous evening, for, after all, M. du Châtel was no friend of his father's, and though his dream was now so dim that he could hardly remember it at all, it had left behind a vague discomfort. He was sorry, somehow, that the émigré had come to Rose Cottage, and when a rather earlier bedtime than usual was suggested to him by Mme. de Chaulnes, who said that he looked tired, he had no objections to offer.

And, being really sleepy, he had no apprehensions as to the night, and did not want the hot posset which Mlle. Angèle was kind enough to bring up to him after he was in bed and Elspeth had left him, though for politeness' sake he sat up and sipped it, while Mlle. Angèle waited and smiled at him, encouraging him to finish it to the last drop. It had a flavour which Anne did not much relish, but having been taught that it was rude to make remarks on the food which was put before him, he said nothing on this point. Yet he was glad when he had finished, and when Mlle. Angèle, kissing him, went away and left him, with only the night-light and his goldfish for company, to that very sound sleep which was stretching out inviting arms to him.

CHAPTER VI

"A LITTLE BOY LOST"

(I)

IN a cheap little room, not much more than a garret, at the top of a house off Tottenham Court Road, the Chevalier de la Vireville was shaving himself before a cracked mirror. As he did so he hummed, experimentally, the 'Marseillaise,' which it amused him at times to render, fitting to it, however, when he actually sang it, the burlesque words of Royalist invention, 'le jour de boire est arrivé,' 'c'est pour nous que le boudin grille,' and the rest. The light filtered through the dirty, uncurtained window on to his strong, aquiline features, the bold chin with a cleft in it, the mouth with its lines of recklessness and humour; and threw up too the marks of stress of some kind—it was difficult to tell of what kind—which had bitten into it too deeply for it to be altogether a handsome or an attractive countenance. Even as it was, when Fortuné de la Vireville's smile was merely devil-may-care and not cynical, it had its charm. Yet something had marred his expression, though neither women nor wine held any attraction for him. He followed danger, a commerce which no doubt has purifying effects on some characters, but which in others is apt to breed consequences not altogether commendable; and he followed it intemperately, as though life had very little value for him. With life indeed he possessed only one enduring tie—his mother in Jersey—and, so his friends whispered, the remembrance of another, most un-

timely snapped. Yet for all this he certainly seemed to find a relish in an existence of the most constant and varied peril, and envisaged his hazards with an unfailing and sometimes inconvenient humour.

The ways in which he 'lived dangerously' were these: He was, first and foremost, a Chouan chief, leading, in a ceaseless guerrilla warfare of sudden attacks and ambushes, among the broom and hedgerows of Brittany, those stubborn little long-haired men of an elder race whose devotion to their religion and their King was almost fanaticism. Secondly, he was intermittently an 'agent de la correspondance'—that is to say, he was in constant personal communication with Jersey, the centre whence set forth all the small Royalist descents on the coast of Brittany and Normandy. Here Captain Philip d'Auvergne, the Jerseyman, titular Prince de Bouillon and captain in His Britannic Majesty's Navy, watched over the interests of the French émigrés and directed the various gun-running expeditions to France. When, therefore, as at the present time, La Vireville was not risking his life amongst Republican bullets, he was venturing it in a little boat, crossing to and fro from Jersey to the Breton coast, liable to be shot at sight by a patrol as he landed, liable to be wrecked on his passage, because secrecy demanded so small a vessel. It was true that the 'Jersey correspondence' had three luggers and a brig of its own, but these were generally used for transporting whole parties of returning émigrés, and in any case they never came right in to shore.

And always, in whatever capacity La Vireville trod his native soil, his head was forfeit, since he was an émigré, and in his own person, as the Chevalier Charles-Marie-Thérèse-Fortuné de la Vireville, liable to summary execution. It really needed not that a couple of months ago the Convention had also issued the large reward of five thousand francs for the body, dead or alive, of 'Augustin, ci-devant noble, chef de

Chouans'; for 'Augustin' and he had but one body between them. Like most of the Chouan leaders, La Vireville had a nom de guerre, and many even of his followers knew him by no other. Little, however, did the reward for his person trouble him, since he knew his Bretons incapable of betraying him for money, and was very sensibly persuaded that, his head being forfeit in any case, it did not concern him whether, when he had parted with it, any other person were to reap pecuniary benefit by the separation. Only, as a sacrifice to prudence—about the only one he ever made, and that more for the sake of the cause he served than for his own—he strove to keep apart as much as he could these two selves, and, so far, he had reason to believe the Republican Government ignorant of their identity.

When he had finished his shaving operations, La Vireville, still humming, looked round the scantily appointed dressing-table for something upon which to wipe his razor. On the threadbare dimity lay, in tempting proximity, a folded paper with worn and soiled edges, but this he refrained from using. It was, in fact, the proclamation in question for the person of 'Monsieur Augustin,' and, as it possessed the merit of being very inaccurate in its description of that person, he had the habit of carrying it upon him—partly, he declared, as an amulet. The Republic one and indivisible had not, he averred, the wits to conceive that a man would voluntarily carry about with him his own death-warrant.

"Head of a ci-devant!" he observed now, wiping the razor upon a piece of newspaper, and making a grimace at his image in the glass. "No, Augustin, my friend, you will get a bullet through your heart before ever that ornament rolls into the basket and is shown to an admiring crowd." And indeed this was highly probable.

He was about to put down the razor when the

tarnished mirror suddenly revealed to him a tiny trickle of blood on his left cheek, just below the short furrowed scar that ran across it. He had cut himself in shaving—the most infinitesimal injury, yet, after standing a moment staring at the glass, he gave a violent exclamation, dabbed at the place with a hasty handkerchief, and threw the scarcely flecked linen from him as though it were a thing accursed. For a Chouan, of all men, the action, with its suggestion of repugnance, was strange.

However, in another minute his brow cleared and he proceeded with his toilet. Then, once more humming the 'Marseillaise,' he sat down upon the bed and looked over the contents of a letter-case which he drew from his pocket. A missive in a fine large flourishing hand signed "Bouillon" informed him that the writer was eagerly expecting his arrival to confer with him as to the landing of a cargo of arms and ammunition near Cap Fréhel on the Breton coast. And, in fact, it was M. de la Vireville's intention to set out this morning for Southampton, thence to Jersey, on this matter. Another letter was there, from Jersey also, in a feminine hand. The smile which was not cynical came about the émigré's lips as he re-read it, and, being a Frenchman, he lifted and kissed his mother's letter. A third was the several days' old note from the Marquis de Flavigny, telling him of the time of the conference which he had already attended in Mr. Elphinstone's house.

"Tudieu!" exclaimed M. de la Vireville as he came upon this. "And I promised to say good-bye to the baby. I wonder have I the time?"

He sprang up to put together his few effects, and in a very short space was making his way westwards

(2)

Mr. Elphinstone got up from his memoirs when the

Chevalier de la Vireville was shown in to him in the library.

"I am afraid that I am interrupting you, sir," said the émigré. "If so, it shall only be for a moment."

"You are not interrupting me at all," returned the old gentleman pleasantly. "I am very glad to see you, M. de la Vireville; pray sit down. But I thought you had started for Jersey."

"I am just about to do so, sir," said La Vireville, obeying him. "I came to take my leave of you and of Anne."

"The child will indeed be sorry to miss you," observed his grandfather. "He was afraid that he might. He has gone away, quite unexpectedly, upon a visit."

"Tiens!" said La Vireville, surprised; "Anne on a visit! That is something new. May one ask where he is gone?"

"He has gone to compatriots—some old friends of his father's at Canterbury. I am glad that the child should have a change of air, for he has been looking a trifle pale lately, so when my son-in-law's letter came I was glad to pack him off—under Elspeth's charge, of course."

But the Frenchman did not seem to be sharing Mr. Elphinstone's pleasure at the change of air. "*Canterbury!*" he reiterated sharply. "*Canterbury!* I did not know that René had friends at Canterbury."

"Nor did I, to tell the truth," confessed Mr. Elphinstone. "I do not think, in fact, that he was aware of it himself till he came across them on his way through Canterbury to Dover the other day."

"On his way to Dover!" repeated the émigré. "But, Mr. Elphinstone, René did not go to Dover! He crossed from Harwich to Germany, of course."

"I think you must be mistaken, sir," replied the old gentleman mildly. "His letter came from Canterbury, at all events. It bears the postmark. But what is wrong then?"

For La Vireville was on his feet, looking very grave.

"Have you the letter here?"

Considerably astonished, Mr. Elphinstone took it out of his pocket. "This is what he says: 'I have just met, by chance, two very old friends of my family, who have been living here, it appears, for a couple of years or so—Mme. and Mlle. de Chaulnes. They are very anxious to make Anne's acquaintance, and I have promised them that they should do so as soon as possible. If, therefore, you would send him to Canterbury with Elspeth for a few days on receipt of this, I should be greatly obliged. He would be well looked after.' And enclosed was an invitation from the French lady herself."

La Vireville gave a cry. "It wanted only this! Good God, sir, what have you done? Mme. de Chaulnes—the poor child!" He almost snatched the letter from the old man's astonished hand and took it to the window. "Yes, a very good imitation, though—pardon me—you ought to know your son-in-law's handwriting better. . . . Mon Dieu, what a disaster! When did the boy go?"

"Last Wednesday," answered Mr. Elphinstone, looking dazed. "But what in God's name do you mean, M. de la Vireville? He got there safely. I have even had a letter from him to-day in which he speaks of the two kind ladies—see, 'The two old ladies who are very gentle to me'—he means kind, *gentil*; he often uses that expression—'and their grey cat.' So it is all true, and he is there. . . . I do not understand you."

"Of course he got there safely—would to God he had not!" exclaimed La Vireville in a sort of desperation. "But, all the same, those two kind old ladies are spies in the pay of the Convention. We have only recently discovered it, to our cost. And clever! . . . How did they get their information—know that René was leaving England just at this time, even know the name of Anne's nurse?"

"It must be all right," reiterated Mr. Elphinstone piteously. "No one could have told them but René himself."

"Mr. Elphinstone, I repeat, René never went to Canterbury! I myself set him a mile or two on his way to Harwich. That is the one mistake these women have made, or, it may be, a risk that they deliberately ran, trusting that you would not know the route your son-in-law took—as you did not. As for the rest, there has been treachery somewhere—in the house, almost certainly. . . . I warned René. . . . However, time is too valuable to spend in finding out who sold them information. The more pressing matter is to get the child back before it is too late."

Mr. Elphinstone put his hand to his head. "Too late! . . . I still do not understand. What could they do to him?"

"Anne knows a good many things it were better he did not know, sir. I fear that I am responsible for some of his knowledge. That is no doubt why they wanted him."

"You mean they——"

"They will try to get information out of him. Oh, they will not do him any bodily harm; it would not advantage them; but they may frighten him, le pauvre petit! He will come back to you, sir, never fear"—for the old man had sunk into a chair and had hidden his face—"but I am very much afraid he will leave something behind. They will wheedle secrets out of him, for he knows things—he cannot help but know them."

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Elphinstone hoarsely, his head still between his hands.

"I think I had best post off to Canterbury instantly. Give me your written authority to bring the child back at once."

"But you—you were going to Jersey . . . and ought you, M. de la Vireville, of all people, to run your head into a nest of spies, as you say they are?"

15740

La Vireville gave a shrug. "That cannot be helped," said he. "Believe me, it will be much more difficult if you send an Englishman. Moreover, it is very necessary that I should discover, if I can, how much they have got out of Anne. Do not set the law in motion unless I neither return to-morrow nor send you news. And—you must pardon me—but I shall want money, possibly a good deal of money."

Mr. Elphinstone pulled himself out of his chair, and, going to a safe, began with trembling hands to unlock it.

"I cannot believe that you are right," he said brokenly. "And he had Elspeth—he even took his new goldfish with him. . . ."

"Neither Elspeth nor a goldfish, I fear, will serve as a talisman," returned the Frenchman rather grimly, pocketing the notes and gold that the old man pushed into his hands. "These two years that Mme. and Mlle. de Chaulnes, as they call themselves, have lived on the Dover road, professedly as sympathisers with the Royalist cause, they have been the reason of more of our plans miscarrying, more of our agents being betrayed, than any half-dozen of the Convention's male spies put together. You see, they are really of noble birth."

"René says in his letter that they are old friends—but I forget, you say his letter is a forgery."

"As to their having known his family in the past I cannot say," replied La Vireville. "It is possible, since they are renegades. The mischief is, that we have only just found out their treachery. This, I suppose, is a last effort before giving up their trade—in Canterbury at least. Now a line, sir, to authorise me to bring the child back."

Mr. Elphinstone wrote it, scarcely able to control his pen. "God grant you are successful!" he said, as he gave it to the Chouan.

"I will do my best, sir," returned the latter. "I do not want to alarm you unduly, and, on my soul, I

think they only wanted Anne for what they could get out of him in the way of information. *We* shall be the losers by that, not you; and so I hope to bring him back safely in a couple of days at most. In any case, I will write to you from Canterbury to-night. Au revoir!"

He wrung the old man's hand and departed.

If there were any room in any house in London which held at that hour more anguish of soul than Mr. Elphinstone's study, it would have been hard to find it.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHEVALIER DE LA VIREVILLE MEETS "MONSIEUR AUGUSTIN"

WHEN the Chevalier de la Vireville, wet and draggled from his long ride, flung himself off his horse at the gate, and knocked on the door of the little house at Canterbury, that door was not very speedily opened. Yet the occupants of Rose Cottage were not engaged in anything visibly nefarious: Mme. de Chaulnes was merely copying a paper, in her regular pointed writing, at the table in the little hall, and, after exchanging a glance with her sister-in-law, she quite unhurriedly sanded over what she had written and, putting it away in a drawer, took up some embroidery. Mlle. Angèle, equally unhurried, rose and opened.

So La Vireville saw, through the frame of the door, an idyllic picture of a beautiful and serene old age bent over fine needlework. His mouth tightened a little as he took off his dripping hat to Mlle. de Chaulnes.

"Mesdames will permit that I enter?" he asked in his own tongue.

"If you have business with us, certainly, Monsieur," replied Mlle. Angèle, standing back, and the very steadiness of her tone, its absence of surprise, seemed to hint that she knew what he had come about. He threw a look down the path at his horse, standing, too spent to move, at the gate, and stepped in, uttering apologies for his wet and muddy condition.

"Monsieur appears indeed to have ridden far, and in haste," remarked Mme. de Chaulnes, responding to his salute with an inclination of the head, but still con-

tinuing her embroidery. "Pray give yourself the trouble to hang your cloak by the fire. Angèle, perhaps Monsieur will partake of some refreshment?"

But Monsieur declined. "I am in haste, Mesdames. I think you can guess why. I have come, on the part of his grandfather, to take away the little boy whom you have with you—Anne-Hilarion de Flavigny."

Mme de Chaulnes raised her still beautifully-marked eyebrows. "What a singular hour to arrive, Monsieur! But you are forestalled. The little boy went back with his nurse this afternoon—no, not by the stage-coach, in a postchaise. They must be at Rochester by now; you will have passed them on the road."

The émigré's face grew dark. "Madame, would not truth be better? I am not a very credulous person. It will be quite easy for me to procure a magistrate's warrant against you. I have the written authority of the boy's grandfather."

Mme. de Chaulnes looked at him with a very finished composure. "I am afraid that I do not quite follow you, Monsieur. I have already had the honour to tell you that the child was sent back this afternoon. . . . Ah, I see—you do not believe me! Well, it will no doubt be quite easy to procure a warrant; we are only two women in a strange country; but I think it would advantage you very little, since no amount of search warrants—if that is what you are threatening—will produce what is not there. Pray examine our poor house yourself, if that will give you satisfaction; you are at perfect liberty to do so. Angèle, light a candle and conduct Monsieur."

It was on the tip of La Vireville's tongue to refuse, for he was convinced that the offer would never have been made if the boy were still there. In that respect at least the truth had probably been spoken. But the operation would give him time for thought. "Yes, if you please, I will do so," he said, and while the younger lady lighted a candle, stood silent, looking at

the elder, as she calmly threaded a needle. Of how many lives like his had not those fragile old fingers lately held and twisted the thread!

Mlle. Angèle preceded him up the stairs.

"See," she said, throwing open a door, "here is my sister's bedroom; pray do not hesitate to enter! There is a cupboard on that side; he might be hidden there, might he not? Here is my own room; let me light the candles for you. There is no cupboard in this room—one of its disadvantages. And this is the room the child had; as you see, it could hardly be emptier."

The exquisitely-ordered room certainly bore no sign of recent occupation nor of hurried flight. The spotless bed, new clothed, looked as if no one had ever slept therein; every chair was in its place, and the dimity-hung dressing-table, whose glass had reflected—how short a time ago?—Anne's childish countenance, seemed primly to reproach the intruder for his suspicions. Yet a chill despair invaded the Frenchman's heart. All had been indeed well planned!

Mlle. Angèle stood regarding him with a curious smile on her round, comfortable face as he walked mechanically to the bow-window in which, with a little space round it, stood the dressing-table. And La Vireville was there almost a score of seconds, looking down at the polished boards at something half hidden by the folds of dimity, before he realised at what he was staring—at a goldfish slowly swimming round and round in a glass bowl.

He stooped and picked it up, and, without speaking, faced Mlle. de Chaulnes, holding it out a little towards her. Then, still silent, he went past her and downstairs, the glass dangling from his hand, and water and fish swinging violently in their prison. Mme. de Chaulnes was still bent over her needlework as he set his discovery down in front of her.

"A sign of a somewhat hurried departure, Madame, I think," he said quietly. "I conceive the child would

hardly be likely to leave this willingly behind, nor would there be any reason why he should—if he were returning to his grandfather's house, as you allege."

"You should be in the secret service, Monsieur," was all that Mme. de Chaulnes vouchsafed, but she looked at the little captive and compressed her lips.

"Thank you, Madame," retorted the émigré, seating himself at a little distance. "I leave that trade henceforward to your sex. It is only recently that one has become aware of your talents in that direction —talents rather unusual in one of your birth."

The old lady was quite unruffled. "If it is your intention, Monsieur, to remain here to insult us, of course you can do so with impunity. We cannot eject you. Otherwise I would suggest your returning to London, if you wish to see the little boy . . . or else continuing your interrupted journey to Jersey, and relieving the impatience of the Prince de Bouillon."

La Vireville, though he received this stroke with a steady bearing, had nevertheless a somewhat numb sensation, for of course her knowledge of his destination almost certainly meant that Anne had been talking.

"Ah, you know me?" he asked carelessly.

"You could not expect our little visitor to be tongue-tied, especially on a subject so interesting to him as M. le Chevalier de la Vireville."

Probably the worst was coming now. But, at all events, it was something that she should let him see how much she knew.

"Yes," went on Mme. de Chaulnes, "he gave us a very agreeable and lifelike picture of his doings in Cavendish Square, and of his many French friends, so that it was not hard to recognise you, Monsieur . . . *Augustin*!"

The name was merely breathed. La Vireville was only just able to check an exclamation. Anne had indeed, poor innocent, betrayed him! But how did he know his nom de guerre? Then he remembered

that it had been used in the child's presence when he sat on his lap that night in Mr. Elphinstone's dining-room. . . . Well, it was his own doing, for it was he who had retained him there. Perhaps it did not very much matter after all; it was quite conceivable that these old plotters, with the sources of information which had in the past been only too open to them, had found out his identity by other means. But, remembering that meeting, a very disquieting fear suddenly came over him. How much of another matter had Anne heard and understood?

Mme. de Chaulnes looked at his face and openly laughed.

"You are wondering, M. le Chevalier . . . M. Augustin—which do you prefer?—how much the child remembered of the conversation you held about the proposed Government expedition? But, you see, we know all about that—from other sources. Only the place—the suggested place of landing. . . . Unfortunately, Anne was not able at first to recall the name."

"Why do you say 'at first'?" broke in La Vireville.

"Because it is the truth. By now he may have remembered."

"Where is he?" demanded the Chouan, who was holding himself in with difficulty.

Mme. de Chaulnes shrugged her shoulders. "I have told you. Somewhere between here and Rochester."

"Madame, you are lying!" said La Vireville. "Between here and Paris would be nearer the mark. You have sent him over to France because you think he knows a thing which, if he did know it, is not of the slightest importance."

"Your assurance on that point, Monsieur, is naturally most valuable! What he told us about yourself, for instance, was of so little moment, was it not?"

"Of very little," returned La Vireville hardily. "You probably knew it already. . . . Come, Madame, let us play with our cards on the table. I know

yours, even if you do not display them, and you, I fancy, know mine now. Do not think to keep up any longer this farce of having sent the child home. You have shipped him over to France God knows of what use the revelations of a child of five or six can be to the Committee of Public Safety, even if he do reveal anything to them, and that I am certain he would never do unless he were tricked into it, as you tricked him."

"Ah, Monsieur," said the old lady, smiling, "you speak as a man, and a strong man. It is not so difficult to make a small boy speak—or remember!"

A thrill of fear and abhorrence ran down La Vireville's spine, and he drew back from the table on which he was leaning.

"No, no!" said Mme. de Chaulnes, putting up a delicate mittened hand. "No, nothing of that sort was necessary. Angèle here can testify to that. We were old friends of his father's, devoted Royalists—what need for more? But if he were obstinate, I could not answer . . ."

The mask was off now. They *had* sent him to France, then.

"Madame, where is he?" asked La Vireville sternly. "It is I who can put force in motion here, remember!"

"You threaten us with those same repugnant methods, then, Monsieur?"

"God forbid! I merely want to come to terms. If the child has already reached France——"

"Then neither you, Monsieur, whatever power you may command here, nor his grandfather, nor all the magistrates' warrants in England will get him out again—no, not the whole British Army!"

La Vireville made no reply to this unpleasant truth. "What I cannot understand," he said, "is your motive for sending him there—unless it be sheer cruelty. You cannot seriously regard him as a source of information; moreover, you have, apparently, already pumped him dry."

Mme. de Chaulnes smiled a little. "He is an intelligent child, and an attractive. His father no doubt adores him—motherless only son as he is."

And on that, in a flash, La Vireville saw the whole thing. They were going to use Anne as a bait. They hoped his father, that adversary of parts, would follow him into the jaws of destruction.

"As you are no doubt aware," he said slowly, "the Marquis de Flavigny is little likely to hear of his son's kidnapping for some time to come. Your acquaintance, however procured, with the family affairs will tell you that he is not in England at present."

"Measures will be taken to inform him during the course of his travels on the Continent," replied Mme. de Chaulnes with calm. "If the information does not reach him, well——"

She left the sentence unfinished, her needle pursuing its unfaltering course. La Vireville watched it, his brain busy with all sorts of desperate schemes.

"I have almost the feelings of a father for Anne myself," he remarked at length.

"That is most creditable to you, Monsieur."

"Would it not be possible for *me* to play the part designed for the Marquis de Flavigny, or is he irreplaceable?"

Mme. de Chaulnes put down her needle and looked her compatriot in the face. In those old clear eyes, wells of falsehood, he could read nothing save an implacable will.

"You would do . . . better," she said.

"Faith, I am flattered!" cried La Vireville gaily, though, to tell the truth, he felt a little cold. "Will you instruct me how to play the part?"

"It is simple. Fired with this quasi-paternal anxiety, you go to France after the child and attempt to recover him."

The Chevalier de la Vireville laughed. "A fine 'attempt'! Do you think, Madame, that I am fool

enough to venture my head for no better a chance than that? After all, I am *not* his father."

"No," said Mme. de Chaulnes coolly, "naturally you could never recover him that way. But, of course, there is another method."

"You mean . . . exchange?"

"Precisely."

There was a pregnant silence. The goldfish suddenly ceased swimming, and gaped at the Frenchman through its prison walls.

"But you are not his father, one sees," resumed the old lady, and took up her embroidery again. "So why consider it? He will forget England and his surroundings—in time. I do not suppose he will be unkindly used; someone will probably adopt him and bring him up to a useful trade."

"Some foster-father like Simon, no doubt," commented the émigré bitterly. In his mind was the little prisoner of the Temple, so soon, had La Vireville known it, to be free of his captivity for ever. The thought of that martyred innocence pierced him as nothing else could have done, and he went straight to the point. "How could I possibly have any guarantee that, if I gave myself up, the bargain would be respected, and the boy sent back unharmed?"

For the second time the old lady looked at him long and steadily. Then she opened a drawer in the table and took out a paper which she laid before him.

"That has been arranged for," said she. "Here is the child's passport out of France all ready. You have only to convey it to him."

"Parbleu!" exclaimed the émigré, "this has all been very prettily planned! I can scarcely flatter myself that it was entirely for my benefit, since it was by mere chance that I came upon this errand."

Again Mme. de Chaulnes smiled that wintry smile. "Do not seek to probe too deeply, Monsieur. Yet, since you spoke of playing with the cards on the table, the Convention would, perhaps, rather see your band of

Chouans leaderless, Monsieur Augustin, than possess themselves of the person of M. de Flavigny, who, after all, has no such forces at his disposal. 'Tout étant fait pour une fin, tout est nécessairement pour la meilleure fin.' You know your *Candide*, no doubt. . . . But to return to business. Does this safe-conduct convince you ? "

"Only tolerably," answered La Vireville, as he examined it. "It would convey to me much more conviction if there were ever any chance of its reaching the child. You know as well as I, Madame, that I should be apprehended as an émigré the moment I set foot at Calais or Boulogne. No doubt that would suit the Convention just as well—better, in fact—but you can scarce expect it to make much appeal to me. I shall never have a second head ; I do not propose to make those gentlemen a present of it for nothing. I also must have some kind of a safe-conduct, to protect me till my business is done."

"Really, Monsieur Augustin, you are very exacting," observed Mme. de Chaulnes. "Yet there is sense in what you say."

"I dare say that you, in your providence, have already such a safe-conduct made out for me ?" hazarded he.

"Not altogether fully," said his adversary, and again she put her hand into the drawer. "It is blank, for we did not know who might be fired by the idea of rescue—though, to tell the truth, from what the boy said of your relations with him, we began to hope that we might have the pleasure of seeing you. . . . Shall we fill it in ? "

La Vireville looked at her steadily as she faced him, the embroidery still in one frail, blue-veined hand, mockery round her mouth. It was sheer insanity. He had no right to do it, for he knew his life to be a hundred times more valuable than a child's happiness. He could be very ill-spared in Northern Brittany, in Jersey. . . . And though his real intention was not

merely to cross the Channel and deliver himself up as a hostage, but by hook or by crook to get Anne out of France and himself into the bargain, the chances were quite fifty to one against his succeeding, and he knew it. It was just the knowledge that he was acting against all the canons of common sense and perhaps even of duty that decided La Vireville—that, and an intolerable picture of a little boy who had never known an unkind word being "brought up to some useful trade."

He nodded. "Yes, if you please."

"Angèle, ma chérie," said Mme. de Chaulnes, putting down the embroidery, "you can pen M. le Chevalier's description better than I. Have the goodness, Monsieur, to tell my sister your height and your age; the rest she can see for herself."

Mlle Angèle got pen and ink, while La Vireville, not unamused, gave her the required information. Then, looking up at him from time to time as he sat there, she wrote much more, and he knew that such a description of his personal appearance, drawn from the life, must almost inevitably, in the end, be his ruin, for in sitting for his own portrait he was also sitting for that of 'Monsieur Augustin.' And he wondered whether the picture now taking shape under her pen were flattering or the reverse. Some of the Government 'signalements' which he had seen posted up in Brittany were remarkable for their fidelity to detail. . . . At any rate, he was not forced to reveal to this artist, now accumulating unimpeachable material, what other scars he carried besides that, only too obvious, on his cheek.

"It will be best, Angèle," said Mme. de Chaulnes as the writer finished, "to put, not Monsieur's name, which for this purpose he might find inconvenient, but 'the person recommended by' and then the cypher signature. It will be best also to fill in the route to be taken, lest a fancy should seize Monsieur Augustin to go by way of Brittany, for example."

The émigré was about to protest, when it occurred to him that she might conceivably indicate the same route as that taken by Anne and his escort, which it would be a great convenience to know, since his mind was entirely set on overtaking them before they got to Paris. It need hardly be said that he had no intention of putting foot in that city if he could possibly avoid it.

Mlle. de Chaulnes passed the document to her sister-in-law, who read it through carefully.

"Excellent," she said. "I fear, M. Augustin, that you will not henceforward derive much immunity from the inaccuracy of the Convention's previous description of your person. You have taken a copy, Angèle?"

"Yes," said the younger lady.

Mme. de Chaulnes folded the passport, and gave it, together with Anne-Hilarion's safe-conduct back to England, to the prospective rescuer. "Voilà, Monsieur!" she said. "Take that to the Committee of Public Safety and you will find that it will do what you wish for the child. You need have no fear that it will not, for the Committee is something in our debt. But I take leave to doubt if your intentions are quite as heroic as they appear."

"I lay claim to no heroism of any kind," said La Vireville shortly, and, putting the papers in his breast, he took up his wet cloak.

Mme. de Chaulnes meanwhile had, for the first time, got to her feet, and stood leaning upon her stick. "Of course, M. le Chevalier, you do not think we are so blind as not to know what you mean to do. But, believe me, you will never be able to do it. For one thing, you will not be able to overtake them before Paris. They have twenty-four hours' start of you."

"Madame," retorted Fortuné de la Vireville, his hand on the latch of the door, "some have thought that children are peculiarly the objects of angelic

protection. We shall see about that twenty-four hours' start!"

As he shut the door he was aware of a little laugh, and the words, in a voice of mock surprise, "Monsieur est donc dévot?"

Dévot indeed La Vireville was not, and no real confidence in celestial intervention, but wrath and dismay filled his heart as he rode off in the rain and the darkness. But it was not in him to show other than a bold front to an enemy, whatever his secret apprehensions. It was not very likely that he would be able to get the boy out of the hands of his captors without, himself, paying the ultimate penalty. Still, there was a chance, and he meant to stake everything upon it. Only, as he hastened to the *Rose and Crown* to change his horse, it occurred to him most unpleasantly that perhaps he was being utterly duped; that Anne-Hilarion had, perhaps, never been taken to France after all, and that he was going to put his head into the lion's mouth for nothing. And he cursed the maddening uncertainty of the whole affair, where the only fact that stood out with real clearness was the jeopardy in which he was about to place his own neck.

In the midst of the business of hiring another horse, he suddenly remembered Elspeth, and wondered that he had not thought of her before. She must know something. But where was she? Had they shipped her off too? It seemed unlikely—yet equally unlikely was it that they had either left her free to hurry back to London with her tale, or had made away with her. They had probably arranged for a temporary disappearance. If he looked for her he would waste the time on which so much depended, and even if he found her she would not, probably, be able to tell him a great deal. And so La Vireville, whose life of late years had taught him the faculty of quick decision, resolved not to pursue that trail.

He wrote at the inn a letter to Mr. Elphinstone,

explaining what he was about to do, made arrangements for it to be taken by special messenger to London, and, in a quarter of an hour or so, on a fresh horse, was galloping through the rainy night along the Dover road.

BOOK TWO

THE ROAD TO ENGLAND

"O they rade on, and farther on,
And they waded rivers abune the knee;
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea."

THOMAS THE RHYMER.

CHAPTER VIII

Some Results of listening to Poetry

(I)

Mathieu Pourcelles had now definitely become a nuisance to the habitués of that old-established house of entertainment, the *Hôtel du Faisan et de la Constitution* at Abbeville. To the patron indeed he was more than a nuisance ; he was a source of frenzy. But since Mathieu's elder brother, the notary, was the patron's creditor to the extent of some two thousand francs, the patron had to suffer him, and all the clients of the *Faisan* had to suffer him too—unless they removed their custom to another hostelry. And this, to be exact, was what they were gradually doing, for there are limits even to the patience of a decent citizen who has for years played his nightly little game of draughts at the same tavern and does not favour changes.

It shall briefly be revealed what was the matter with Mathieu Pourcelles. He was a poet. Nor was he a good poet ; nay, not even an indifferent poet. But his muse was both prolific and patriotic, giving birth to some abortion at almost every public event, and though all good citizens of Abbeville were properly interested in such occurrences as, say, the repeal of the Law of the Maximum, they preferred a plain newspaper account of it to Mathieu's rythmical rendering. Yet if they showed undue restiveness under the poet's outpourings it was just conceivable that, seeing the subject of his verse, they might be suspected

of 'incivisme.' And thus there was little help for them.

On a certain evening, then, in April 1795, Mathieu entered the *Faisan* a little earlier than usual. In his hand was a fresh, untumbled manuscript. Several citizens incontinently rose, paid their scores, and went out. The patron cast an agonised look at their retreating backs, and one full of venom at Mathieu's. The poet, a lanky personage, sat down, gave the smallest possible order for refreshments, and, after scandalously few preliminaries and a marked absence of any kind of encouragement, unrolled his manuscript.

"I have here, fellow-citizens, some verses which I should like to submit to your valued judgment." Such was Mathieu's formula to-night. "These verses deal with the present situation of the arms of our beloved country, being, in fact, an 'Ode on the Peace recently concluded between the glorious Republic and Prussia.'"

All present resigned themselves, except one man who ostentatiously buried himself in a news-sheet. Mathieu, than whom was no happier mortal at that moment between the English Channel and the Pyrenees, began joyfully to roll forth his periods and his execrable rhymes. And, weedy though he was of aspect, his own outpourings soon began increasingly to inflate his not inconsiderable voice, so that presently the room rang with his bellowings, and the table before him jumped as he pounded it.

Among all his unwilling listeners he had none a tenth part as interested as a small, tired-looking boy who sat, a spoon in his hand, at a table some distance away. With him was a neat man of forty who, in the midst of his own repast, attended to his small companion's wants. Since the opening of Mathieu's performance the child had more or less neglected his meal to listen with an attention distinctly strained, his eyes anxiously fixed on the orator. Nor did Mathieu fail, after a while, to observe the flattering behaviour of his youngest

auditor, and at last broke off and apostrophised him, trusting, he said, that his young friend would profit by these lessons, and remember them in years to come.

The young friend, on whom all eyes were immediately turned, shrank back, looking terrified. But Mathieu lost no time in continuing his reading. He was approaching a favourite passage, a purple patch directed against "crowned tyrants," "perfidious Albion," and "those vipers, the émigrés," and so he unleashed fully the voice which was so much at variance with his physique. A man yawned, another banged approval—and the small boy, overcome by emotion or fatigue, hid his face in his hands and burst into tears. His companion tried to quiet him, but the child drew away from him, and the man, evidently annoyed, and muttering, "He is overtired; excuse him, my friends!" picked him up, and carried him out of the room.

Mathieu was not unaccustomed to exits during his performances, but this retreat was rather flattering than otherwise, since it could only be attributed to his power of moving the heart. He paused a moment, smirked, and proceeded.

(2)

Half an hour later, however, he had succeeded in clearing the room in earnest. Yet did he not himself depart, having regard to the possible advent of other guests, but remained awhile, running his hand through his dank hair, and casting up his eyes to the ceiling whenever the patron, scowling, looked in at the door.

His patience was duly rewarded when, at about five minutes to eight, the host ushered in a tall man in a cloak, evidently a traveller. The newcomer ordered a meal, and went to sit at a table in a far corner. Mathieu took stock of him, and finally arose and approached him.

"You are travelling, citizen?"

La Vireville looked carefully at the speaker. He himself desired rather to ask than to answer questions, but the poet appeared harmless. Moreover, having traced Anne-Hilarion and his companion as far as Abbeville, and having already drawn blank at two inns in that town, he was glad of the chance of information. So he said quietly, "Yes, citizen. And you?"

"Ah no; I inhabit Abbeville. You will not have heard of me, citizen, but I am not quite unknown, even in Paris. My name is Pourcelles—Mathieu Pourcelles. I write a little—verse. I wonder if I might presume? . . . You have the look of a lover of letters" (the phrase with which Mathieu was wont to approach any victim not absolutely bucolic). "I may?" And out came the manuscript of the Ode.

La Vireville endured it, eating his omelette, and thinking fast. He was beginning to feel a little baffled. Anne and his escort had certainly come to Abbeville; the point was, had they already left it? It appeared, from the cautious inquiries which he had made along the road from Calais, that the travellers were but little ahead of him—a fact which, in spite of the nearly incredible haste which he had made, seemed almost too good to be true, and which, considering their twenty-four hours' start, he found it difficult to account for. It was risky to ask direct questions, yet he would shortly be driven to that course. But he had not reckoned for the vanity of an author.

"I now come," said the gifted poet, simpering, "to a passage which, as recently as three-quarters of an hour ago, inspired tears in a member of my little audience. It is true that he was very young, but who shall say whether the pure heart of childhood——"

"A child, eh?" interrupted his hearer, continuing to eat, but fixing Mathieu with a very keen gaze. "An infant prodigy, I suppose?"

"No; just a little boy with his father or uncle. But

he was overcome, and had to be taken away. His companion has indeed left his own meal unfinished, no doubt in order to soothe the terror which my description of tyranny had awaked in the childish breast."

"Is this susceptible infant staying in the inn?" inquired La Vireville carelessly.

"I believe so," replied the poet, who had already lost interest in his young hearer, and was itching to declaim the purple passage in question, of which he again stood on the brink. La Vireville made a gesture to intimate that he should do so, and diplomatically neglected his meal to listen.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed at the end. "Magnificent, citizen! You have the foes of our beloved country on the hip, indeed. Those lines about the émigrés, now!"

Mathieu smirked. Then he glowed. "I declare to you, citizen, that if I were to meet one of those scorpions—those vipers, as I have termed them—I would not hesitate a moment to——"

"To denounce him, of course," said La Vireville, helping himself to wine.

"No, citizen, to kill him with these hands!"

"Ma foi," said La Vireville gravely, "if you ply the sword, citizen, as ably as the pen, France may well be proud of you."

Mathieu, much flattered, was beginning an answer, when the door opened and the little boy's guardian reappeared. The poet turned round.

"I trust your charge is recovered!" said he ingratiatingly. "A most interesting child!"

"Thank you," replied the other rather coldly, as he returned to his place; "my nephew was merely overtired." And he ordered coffee, while La Vireville secretly studied him. He looked, thought the Chouan, a person who could neither be bullied nor flustered, a man in whose veins ran some unusually cold liquid. How was he to get him out of the way? Besides, was it certain that the little boy with him was Anne-Hilarion? That he *must* know.

Absorbed in these speculations he paid scant attention to the conclusion of the Ode, which its author had the obligingness to read again for his benefit and for that of the returned guest, who drank his coffee very slowly, but appeared to be interested in neither of his companions. And before very long the Citizen Pourcelles, seeing no fresh worlds to conquer, drifted out, followed, after a moment's hesitation, by La Vireville, who buttonholed him at the door of the hostelry, to say that he could not let him go without thanking him for the pleasure which he had afforded him.

A very little of this balm, dexterously applied, sufficed to get out of the poet a description of the little boy upstairs sufficiently detailed to satisfy La Vireville that he was indeed Anne-Hilarion.

And then, Mathieu having at last taken his departure, La Vireville was left at the door of the inn, revolving plans. It was tempting to go upstairs now, while the man was below, and (if he could find the right room) slip out of the place with the child. But he would be tracked at once. No plan was sound which did not provide, somehow, for the disposal of Anne's captor. La Vireville was not in the least inclined to boggle at the idea of putting a knife into that gentleman if an opportunity occurred; the difficulty was less to provide that opportunity than to get rid of the ensuing corpse. To go in and quarrel with the man would only lead to tumult and imprisonment. Yet if he delayed and followed the two to-morrow, waiting for fortune to smile upon him, they would all three, with every hour, be nearing Paris and leaving the coast farther behind them, and adding thereby to the length and risk of the return journey.

At any rate he would, he decided, stay at the inn for the night, that is, unless Anne and his 'uncle' were proceeding.

"I want a quiet room," he said to the patron. "You can give me one at the back if you choose."

And, the apartment in question being shown to him, he further expressed a hope that there was no one near who would come late to bed and disturb him.

"There is no other guest in the *Hôtel du Faisan*," replied the landlord, "but the citizen downstairs and his little nephew, and they sleep in Number Nine, which is at the other end of the corridor, as you see. And probably the citizen will retire to bed early, because of the child."

"Tiresome," commented the émigré, "to share a room with a child, and to have to regulate your hours of repose accordingly."

"That," said the landlord, with a slightly offended air, "is not really necessary in this case. Number Nine has an inner room opening out of it."

(3)

The fruits of the reflections to which, after this colloquy, the Chevalier de la Vireville abandoned himself in his bedroom were manifested between one and two in the morning, when he stood outside the door which the patron had pointed out at the end of the passage. He had groped his way thither in the darkness, not venturing to bring a candle. At this door he now knocked with extreme gentleness, then again a little louder, and, still receiving no answer, he tried the handle. To his surprise it turned, and the door opened.

"Odd!" thought the intruder. "Mme. de Chaulnes' emissary is of a singularly trustful nature." And he slipped in with great caution.

The room was absolutely dark, but not silent. A heavy snoring proceeded from the bed, and was, indeed, the only evidence of its whereabouts. "I had not somehow thought him a snorer," reflected La Vireville. "At any rate one knows that he sleeps. Now I wonder whereabouts is that inner room?"

Very softly he breathed Anne's name in the close darkness. Nothing but snores answered him.

It was obvious that by feeling round the walls he would arrive in time at the door, shut or open, of the other room, for whose presence the landlord had vouched. La Vireville began this circumnavigation (so he discovered) in the neighbourhood of the wash-stand; proceeded a little—going very slowly and quietly, and feeling carefully with his hands—passed a hanging press, the fireplace, and began to be conscious that he was approaching the bed. He stopped, not wishing to collide with it, and at that moment found his hands resting on something thrown over the back of a chair. And that something was—yes, there could be no doubt—a pair of corsets.

"Ciel!" exclaimed the petrified émigré below his breath. Wild ideas scurried instantly through his brain, as that Anne's companion was really of the corset-wearing sex, or that he had a woman with him, or—— Then a simpler explanation visited him; he had, in the darkness without, mistaken the room, and his present business was to get out of this apartment, whoever were its tenant, as quickly and as quietly as possible. If the snoring fair one should wake! . . . It was a very long minute before he found himself outside the door again.

He set forth the second time with a candle, and found that he had, indeed, mistaken the number. Number Nine was two doors farther on. He could only hope that the snorer would continue the sound sleep in which he had left her, since what he contemplated doing in Number Nine might cause some noise.

He knocked gently at the door of that apartment.

There was instantly a movement within, followed by a sound as of someone getting out of or off the bed. He knocked again, and then the door was unlocked, and opened a foot or two by the man whom La Vireville

sought. He was half-dressed, and had a pistol in his hand. There was a lamp burning in the room.

"May I come in, citizen?" asked La Vireville mildly, facing the barrel with all the appearance of innocent intent. "I wish to speak with you on important business."

The occupant of Number Nine looked at him straight and searchingly with his strange light eyes. Then, still keeping his visitor covered, he moved aside for him to enter, and closed the door behind him, locking it.

La Vireville's immediate dread, on entering, was of finding Anne-Hilarion there, or at least awake in the inner room,—whose door he saw ajar in front of him,—to recognise him, as he surely would, with a cry, and spoil everything. "Shall I close this door?" he suggested, and, turning his back on the pistol, he shut the door which faced him. "We do not want to wake the boy, and it is about him that I have come to speak to you."

"You choose a very strange time for the errand, citizen," observed M. Duchâtel, but he lowered the pistol.

"Yet you were expecting me, were you not?" queried La Vireville, glancing at the bed and the book lying open on it. "*She* told you, of course, that she might send me? On the whole it seemed best, though to be sure he—you know whom I mean—will suffer by it." Anne's gaoler was, he trusted, gravelled by this pronouncement, which was devoid of meaning even to himself; but it was impossible to tell. The man with the goat's eyes merely said curtly:

"I saw you downstairs with that fool of a versifier. Why did you not speak to me then?"

"Juste ciel!" exclaimed the émigré, putting down his candle. "What imprudence! You know her recommendation!"

"I don't know your business—or your credentials!" snapped the other.

"I will show you both," quoth La Vireville sweetly;

and, opening his coat, he pulled out the thin leather case in which he had put the passports. From this he carefully drew forth Anne-Hilarion's, and spread enough of it before his adversary's vision to show him the boy's name.

"Why, what have you there?" exclaimed M. Duchâtel, shaken out of his self-possession. And he added something under his breath about a trick and an old vixen, while, eager for a fuller sight or complete possession of the document, he hastily laid down the pistol on the mantelpiece.

It was the moment for which the Chouan had been waiting. He gave the passport bodily into those incautious hands, and a second later smote their owner with exceeding force on the point of the jaw. M. Duchâtel staggered back, his arms going wide, and the passport flew half across the room as La Vireville followed up with a smashing blow over the heart. The tall mahogany bedpost, which the kidnapper's head next violently encountered, finished La Vireville's work for him with much completeness, but before the inanimate body could slide to the floor La Vireville had grabbed at it and pulled it on to the bed.

"If I have killed him!" he thought, as he bent over his victim, for it looked rather like it. "No; that kind does not die of a good honest blow." With luck, however, he might be unconscious for hours, but it was as well to be on the safe side; so, since it repelled him to cut the throat of a senseless man, he tied his feet with the bell-pull, which he hacked down for the purpose, his hands with the curtain cords. Then he stuffed a towel into his mouth, tied it in position with another, and flung the quilt entirely over him.

He had already possessed himself of M. Duchâtel's papers, reserving their perusal, however, for a more favourable opportunity, and now, picking up Anne-Hilarion's passport, he tiptoed to the door of the inner room, and listened for a moment. Singularly

little noise, on the whole, had attended his assault on Anne's guardian, and there was complete silence the other side of the door, yet La Vireville's heart was nearer his mouth than it had yet been, for a child's shrill scream either of joy or terror—and Anne must be thoroughly unnerved by this time—might bring the house about them. However, the possibility had to be faced, so he opened the door a little and called the boy's name softly. There was no answer, and as the room was in darkness the rescuer had perforce to take the lamp from the larger apartment, and to enter, shading it with one hand.

The Comte de Flavigny was fast asleep in the wide bed, which looked large in the little room, and in which he himself appeared very small, lonely, and pathetic, with one hand under a flushed cheek and the other clutching fast the edge of the patchwork quilt. "The poor baby!" thought La Vireville, but had no time to spend upon sentiment. The main thing, for both their sakes, was to wake him without startling him.

"If I were really the nurse whose duties I now seem to be taking upon myself," thought the Chouan, "I should know better what to do."

He put down the lamp and stooped over the child, shaking the small shoulder very gently, and calling him by name, a hand ready to clap over his mouth if he should scream. At the third or fourth repetition of his name Anne-Hilarion stirred.

"It is not time, Elspeth," he murmured rather crossly, and buried his face in the pillow. "It is not time to get up, I tell you!"

"But it is," asserted La Vireville; "high time. Anne, my little one. . . ." He put his arms under him and lifted him up a trifle.

Anne gave a great sigh and opened his eyes. "Is it thou, Papa? I dreamed—I had such a horrible dream. . . ." Then he returned more fully to waking life. "Who is it?" he said shrilly, beginning to struggle in the strong arms like a captured bird.

"It is I, my child—your friend the Chevalier," said La Vireville, kissing him. "Don't make a noise, little cabbage! See, I am going to take you back to England. But you must be quiet, above all things!"

Anne-Hilarion looked up into his face, the fear in his eyes changed to an almost incredulous joy. "Oh, M. le Chevalier!" he exclaimed. Then he threw his arms round his friend's neck and held him very tight. "Oh, how glad I am! how good of you to come!" he whispered fervently. "But the—that other man in there?"

"He will not trouble us—not, at least, if we are quick. Get into your clothes, Anne, faster than you have ever done in your life. *Can* you get into them?" asked the Chouan a little doubtfully, setting the half-clothed figure down upon the bed, and looking round in the lamplight for more garments.

"Already it is many weeks since I can dress myself," announced the Comte de Flavigny proudly. "But this is my shirt that I have on. I have no night-shirt. He said it did not matter, but I have never before gone to bed in——"

"Never mind," said La Vireville, pitching a few garments on to the bed. They seemed to him ridiculously minute. "How does this go on?"

"That is the wrong way round!" observed Anne, so hilariously that the émigré glanced at the open door and put his finger to his lip. Evidently Anne's faith in him was so great that his mere presence was to him the equivalent of safety.

"Now wait here a moment in the dark," said La Vireville when, between them, a rapid toilet had been effected. "It is only for an instant." He returned with the lamp to the outer room, satisfied himself that Mme. de Chaulnes's emissary was still soundly unconscious under the counterpane, and, unlocking the door, stole out into the passage and listened. There was neither sound nor light anywhere. He went back to Anne-Hilarion.

And, five minutes later, by the simple expedient of letting themselves out of its back door, the Chevalier de la Vireville and his small charge found themselves free of the *Hôtel du Faisan et de la Constitution*, and standing, under the April stars, between high walls in an unsavoury back lane of Abbeville. It was not, indeed, a propitious hour for the walks abroad of a reputable citizen, still less for those of a boy of tender years, but there was now excellent reason why the open air should appeal strongly to them both. Wherefore La Vireville prayed that fate and the darkness should so favour him, that by six or seven o'clock he should find himself at the little port of St. Valéry-sur-Somme, thirteen miles or so down the river, and that there a still further indulgence of the gods would enable him to hire a boat to return across the Channel. For to go back to Boulogne or Calais would be madness, and the chief recommendation of St. Valéry, besides the fact of its being a harbour, was that it lay off all the main roads between those greater ports and Paris. Even then it would be hard enough to get a boat without exciting suspicion. But the Fates had been hitherto so kind that he must go on trusting them.

"I shall have to carry you most of the way, child, so I had best begin now," he whispered, and picked up his half-sleepy, half-excited charge.

CHAPTER IX

THE *TROIS FRÈRES* OF CAEN

BUT Fortune, after whom Fortuné de la Vireville had been somewhat ironically named, had all his life taken away with one hand what she had given him with the other. So now she granted to him to get clear of the town of Abbeville, to find unmolested the way to St. Valéry, to meet thereon none to question or stay him, to arrive there a little before six, when the life of the small port was already bustling, to perceive, lounging on the quayside, a seafaring individual whose countenance seemed to promise accessibility to a bribe . . . and to overhear, at that very moment, a piece of news which made all attempt at bribing him useless. For it was quite clear, from a conversation going on, within easy earshot, between two master mariners, one of whom had evidently just come into harbour, that the greater part of the Brest squadron had come up in the night, and was even now cruising between Dieppe and Boulogne.

"Nine sail of the line, and I don't know how many frigates." Was ever such ill-luck! The fugitives were clean cut off, that way, from the shores of England, while on the road behind them were hastening, or would shortly hasten, the justly-incensed officials of the town of Abbeville. La Vireville knew an instant's real despair, and his fingers tightened involuntarily on the small hand in his. They *must* get back to England. But they could not—at least not by the way of his choice, the most direct and obvious way, the Channel. That path was barred before them. Of

course there was another road. If they could only reach that outpost of England, Jersey! But it was the deuce of a long journey, and since the sea was now denied them, they must go by land till they reached the coast of the Cotentin, a far more hazardous route, armed though La Vireville now was with the fairly extensive powers conveyed to him by M. Duchâtel's papers. . . . Well, they must make the best of a bad business, and the first step was to remove themselves from the harbour, where curious glances were already beginning to be cast at him and his small companion. He must leave as few traces as possible for the inquirers from Abbeville when they came.

La Vireville was, in fact, actually turning away from the shed by which they were standing, when his eyes fell on a vessel at the quayside which he had not previously noticed, a schooner-rigged barque of some three hundred tons burthen, on whose broad stern, surrounded by flourishes, could be read her name and port of origin—the *Trois Frères* of Caen. It was this legend which caused him suddenly to stay his steps and to give vent to a murmured exclamation. What if the fleet of the Republic *were* cruising along the coast from Dieppe to Boulogne! With his face set, not for England, but for a more westerly French port, and the tricolour floating over him, he could pass unscathed through that fleet even if it were encountered. They would go to Caen—if the barque were shortly putting to sea and if the captain would take them. And from Caen, ten or 'welve hours' posting would bring them to the shore of the Cotentin, to Granville, or to Carteret, the nearest port of all France to Jersey. It was an excellent scheme, could it be put in practice, and one possessing an advantage of its own, that by taking to the water at once they would have a very good chance of breaking the scent.

La Vireville looked carefully at what he could see of the *Trois Frères*. A certain subdued bustle among her small crew seemed to indicate an early departure,

which was good. The next problem was the mind of the captain. If that were he, red-faced, blue-eyed, standing near the rail with a pipe in his mouth and occasionally issuing an order, he looked as if he might be open to persuasion. At least the attempt should be made.

All this while Anne-Hilarion had stood patiently, his hand in his rescuer's, asking no questions, and evidently little disposed, after his unwonted night, to take an interest even in the shipping. The émigré bent down to him.

"Anne," he said in a low voice, "I am going to ask the man on that ship to take us to Caen. We cannot go straight to England, as I had hoped. Now you must be sure to bear me out in what you hear me say, even if it is not exactly true. I shall have, I think, to pretend that you are my nephew, so you must remember to call me uncle—never anything else. Very likely I shall pretend also that we live at Caen. You must not say anything about England. You understand, little one?"

"Yes," replied Anne-Hilarion, lifting a rather grimy and pallid face. Then he gave a little sigh, as one who makes a reluctant sacrifice of truth to necessity. And indeed he was a very truthful child; yet La Vireville more correctly interpreted his emotion.

"You want your breakfast, mon petit, do you not? Never mind, you shall soon have it. Only help me to soften the heart of this sea-captain."

And, approaching the *Trois Frères*, the émigré hailed the smoker.

"Are you the master of this ship, citizen?"

The sailor removed his pipe. "Mate," he replied laconically. "Master just coming aboard." He indicated with the stem of his pipe another mariner, also red-faced and blue-eyed, who was making his way round a pile of timber towards the gang-plank. Him La Vireville intercepted, hastily filling up in his own mind the gaps in the story designed for his edification,

since here Duchâtel's papers were not likely to be of much avail.

"Captain," he began enthusiastically, taking off his hat, "the Supreme Being has surely sent you to a fellow-creature in need!"

The master of the *Trois Frères* grunted. "Le bon Dieu is good enough for a plain sailor like me," he responded, and the émigré perceived that he had overshot the mark. "What do you want?"

"I want to go to Caen," returned La Vireville simply. "I and my little nephew here. Can you give us a passage?"

The master of the *Trois Frères* regarded La Vireville and his nephew. "No," he replied, with equal simplicity. "Why should I? I'm a trading vessel, not a packet."

The petitioner came nearer and dropped his voice. "If you will grant me the favour of a word or two in private," he said, "I will tell you why I ask. It is for a most pressing family matter—an affair, I may say, almost of life and death . . . and an affair of haste."

"Come on board then," said the master-mariner briefly, and led the way over the gang-plank to the cabin.

It was that neat little cabin with its shining brass fittings, therefore, which witnessed the apotheosis of the Chevalier de la Vireville as a liar. Even at the time a part of himself was watching the other, the speaking half, with an amused wonder, as he unfolded his tale, recounting how he was hastening, or wished to hasten, to Caen on this most pressing family matter. He had sent Anne-Hilarion to the other end of the cabin, and himself sat, with the captain, at the table in the middle.

"The fact is," he said in lowered tones, after a short exordium, "that my brother's wife has run away from him, and we have reason to believe that she has gone to Caen."

15946

"With her lover, I suppose," finished the sailor bluntly.

"No," said La Vireville; "that is the whole point. My brother believes that he has not yet joined her, though on the way to do so. Hence, citizen, my need of haste. I want to arrive at Caen before it is too late, and to that end I am taking my brother's little son with me to plead his father's cause, and to see if he cannot persuade his unfortunate mother to return."

It was only because he felt sure that Anne, however willing he might be, would inevitably make a slip if required constantly to address him as Papa, that La Vireville had cast himself for the part of uncle in this speedily-imagined drama. Otherwise he might have played the part of the stricken husband rather than that of the sympathetic brother. Indeed, there would have been an advantage in the former rôle, for it would have spared him the captain's next and very natural question:

"Why the deuce does not your brother go after his wife himself?"

La Vireville made a gesture, and throwing his brother from a restive horse some seven days ago, remorselessly broke his leg.

"Where does he live, did you say?"

The émigré domiciled him distantly at Lyons, creating him at the same time a lawyer.

"I know Lyons well," observed the mariner unexpectedly. "You are an affectionate brother, citizen, and you have certainly made extraordinary speed if you have come from Lyons since that leg was broken a week ago."

This was unfortunately true, and La Vireville was forced to assign a date a little more remote to the accident, and to say he had made a slip of the tongue, proceeding afterwards to lay stress on the speed which the lover also might be presumed to be using.

"Well, my friend," remarked the sailor, "speed

was never a characteristic of the *Trois Frères*. Moreover, I have a port or two of call, Dieppe among them. I cannot for the life of me see why you should not go to Caen by land, if you want to get there quickly. If you could post from Lyons to St. Valéry in—how many days did you say?—you ought to make Caen by nightfall!"

"Citizen captain," responded the harassed romancer earnestly, "speed, after all, is not everything in this case! Secrecy is even more important—let me explain to you how important, at this juncture." And he developed this theme, investing his brother's wife's lover with much money and influence, all of which he would use without scruple to circumvent the would-be rescuer, did he know his route. And, acutely conscious all the while of the improbability of his story, La Vireville concluded with a moving reference to the innocent child, about, perhaps, to lose his mother for ever, to the sanctity of the domestic hearth in danger of violation, and to the purity of moral principles inculcated by the glorious Republic. But the rhetoric which, a couple of years ago, would not have failed to move a demagogue who sent a daily score of heads to the guillotine, appeared to be without power over a peaceable and straightforward mariner. The orator indeed, feeling that he was wasting his time, and preparing in addition a net which would probably trip up his own feet, ceased at last disheartened.

His surprise was, therefore, all the greater when the master of the *Trois Frères* said slowly, "Very well, I will give you a passage to Caen." He fingered his chin in a dubious sort of way, looking, however, at his guest with a blue directness of gaze which was anything but undecided, and which the latter could only hope that he was supporting with sufficient firmness. "I suppose your papers are all in order?" he added.

The crucial moment had arrived, for neither Duchâtel's papers nor his own could very well be

made to bear out the Chevalier de la Vireville's story. But the latter laughed cheerfully. "For what do you take me, captain?" he replied. "Do you want to see them?" He began to thrust a hand into his breast.

"No, no! It's the business of the port officer, not mine. Too many papers and nonsense of that kind nowadays," said the sailor, who appeared to have conservative tendencies. "And, by the way, the port officer has already been aboard. Well, if there is any trouble later on, you must represent yourselves as stowaways. Down in the afterhold, you understand, and did not come out till we had cleared the river, and I was not going to delay by putting back to land you."

Nothing would have suited the voyager better than to live the life of a stowaway the whole time, especially if they were going to put into Dieppe, so he received this suggestion warmly. The captain then named his terms, and said he had a spare cabin which would do for his passenger and the boy; after which he slewed round in his chair and stared at Anne, who, kneeling on a locker, had his nose pressed to one of the small stern windows.

"Tell the child to come here," he said. "What is his name?"

"An . . . Annibal," replied La Vireville brilliantly, feeling that "Anne" savoured too much of the old régime, but not equal himself to calling him consistently by a name too dissimilar. "You will not, captain, out of humanity, mention his mother to him, nor why we are going to Caen? Annibal!"

Anne-Hilarion looked round, startled, at this unusual appellation, but seeing his friend's outstretched hand, understood and came. The captain studied his tired, sleepy, dirty little face, his tangled curls, his good but hastily put on clothes . . . and La Vireville had the sudden wonder whether those small kerseymere breeches that reached so nearly to his armpits bore

inside the name of an English maker, or whether they were the work of Elspeth's fingers. Anyhow, the sailor was not likely to investigate the point.

"A little sea-air will do the child good," remarked the latter. "And a meal, I think, as soon as we are out of harbour, as we shall be before long. Don't you agree with me, my boy?"

("Why did I not tell Anne on no account to let fall a word of English?" thought La Vireville to himself. "But I do not suppose he will.")

No; for the Comte de Flavigny naturally responded to a query in French by an answer in the same tongue. And he said, simply and politely:

"If you please, Monsieur."

"*Eh?*" ejaculated the seaman, and a gleam of speculation shot suddenly into his blue eyes. La Vireville felt as if he were sitting on a red-hot chair. He and the child between them had been a little unfortunate, with the Supreme Being on the one hand and that forbidden term of social address on the other—returning to use though it was among the upper classes.

The captain, however, merely shook his head.

"You seem old-fashioned, my boy," he remarked drily, and, rising, went to the door and called to the mate.

Some three-quarters of an hour later the *Trois Frères* was warping slowly out of the basin, and La Vireville, immense relief in his heart, and the hungry Anne-Hilarion on his knee, was giving the child, as they awaited breakfast, a further lesson in the things that he was not to say.

CHAPTER X

Happenings in a Postchaise

(I)

Anne-Hilarion was sorry to say good-bye to the *Trois Frères* at Caen, and all the way up the river from the little port at Ouistreham he sat quietly on deck with a pensive expression. That the vessel's speed at sea had not been very noticeably greater than that with which she now approached the spires of the town distressed him not at all. Everything about her had been delightful, from her dolphin figurehead to her old-fashioned poop, and he only regretted that M. le Chevalier had not allowed him to chatter to her crew as much as he desired.

La Vireville too owed the old barque gratitude. Whether her master really believed his story or no, he had kept to his contract, and asked few supplementary questions. It had been a fine breezy morning when the émigré stood on her deck as she lumbered along the coast towards Dieppe, and looked up at the tricolour beating at the mizen, reflecting that it was the first time he had ever sailed beneath this parvenu flag of his country. Two or three miles out at sea a couple of frigates were visible, the rearguard of the Brest fleet. Against those vessels that flag was their talisman. But he had not looked at it with love for all that.

The alluring prospect of a long ride in a postchaise had been purposely held out to the Comte de Flavigny

as he regretfully left the *Trois Frères*, clutching the striped and polished foreign shell which the captain had given him at parting. It was true that there were some rather unpleasant formalities to be gone through first, in a place which he was told was M. le Maire's office, where a man with a red, white, and blue scarf tied in a great bow—a man whom he instinctively disliked—asked M. le Chevalier a great many questions, and looked at him, Anne-Hilarion, very suspiciously. At last, however, he wrote something on the papers which M. le Chevalier had produced, and then they went to a little hôtel and had a meal, and presently Anne was being assisted into a two-horsed postchaise not quite like those he had seen in England.

"All's well that ends well!" said M. le Chevalier, his mouth relaxing, as with great crackings of the postilion's whip they rolled through the streets of Caen. "They were suspicious of thy good uncle, Anne . . . Annibal, I should say. Imagine, they were disinclined to believe what he said—he who has always been noted for his veracity. But the papers of thy other uncle—the one we left behind at Abbeville, in . . . in bed—convinced them at last."

"You had, perhaps, to invent some more histories about us," suggested his fellow-traveller.

"My nephew, I had. However, they need not concern you. Our kinship still continues."

"Of that," remarked the Comte de Flavigny earnestly, "I am glad." He slipped his hand under his friend's arm. "That other, I did not like him. Could you be my uncle in England also, do you think?"

"Yes, little cabbage," said the Chouan, pulling a curl. "I shall be delighted, once in England again, to assume any relationship you please. At present I feel something like an inexperienced grandmother."

Anne-Hilarion gave a squeak of laughter and hugged his arm. "You are so amusing," he said, looking up at La Vireville with appreciative eyes. "How long before we get to England, M. le Chevalier?"

"That I am afraid I cannot tell you. Only a few days, I trust. But this is how we hope to get there. We shall arrive to-night at a place called Vire, and to-morrow we shall go on to Granville, which, as perhaps you know, Anne, is the nearest port, but one, of all France to Jersey. I think, however, that we shall not enter Granville itself, but that somewhere on the coast we will hire a fisherman's boat to take us to Jersey. And Jersey, you know, is English, and from there it is easy to go to England. Also, after we have left Vire, we shall be on the edge of the country of the Chouans of Normandy, and so we may find friends. And thus I have hopes that there will be no difficulty in procuring a boat, provided that nothing disagreeable happens to us in the town of Vire; for in towns, my dear Anne, they have not that entire faith in the candour of your uncle that we could wish."

"Another boat!" exclaimed Anne. "I shall like that, if the sea is not rough. And then another after that! For Jersey is an island, is it not?"

"You are singularly well informed, nephew. Jersey *is* an island, and one, moreover, which is a good deal nearer to France than to England. Very probably you will go home in an English man-of-war. I think you are enjoying your tour in France, are you not, nephew Annibal?"

"Yes, since *you* came, M. le Chevalier," replied the child. "But I do want to see Papa soon, and Grandpapa, and Elspeth, and——" He checked himself with a sigh. "I suppose I shall never see it again. M. le Chevalier, do you think the grey cat will have eaten it?"

"Eaten what, my child?" asked the émigré, looking down into the dark eyes, clouded with a sudden apprehension. "Ah, you mean your goldfish?"

Anne nodded, the tiniest little droop at the corners of his mouth.

"I think," said the Chevalier de la Vireville, taking his hand, "that we shall find, when we get to Cavendish

Square, that Elspeth has contrived to bring away the goldfish from the house of the old ladies, and that it will be swimming round and round on Grandpapa's table in the library."

A gleam of hope passed over the Comte de Flavigny's grave face, and died away as he said dolefully, "I do not see how Elspeth could find it, and perhaps the old ladies would not let her in. And . . . and . . . where *is* Elspeth ? "

"I am sure that she is quite safe," answered La Vireville in a consoling tone. "She will be in London, you may be certain, before we are. . . . My child, what *is* the matter ? "

For Anne-Hilarion, overtaken by a sudden whirlwind of sobs, had buried his head in the corner of the chaise.

(2)

It was the inevitable breakdown come at last. Had La Vireville reflected a moment, he need not have been so startled ; rather would he have felt surprise that it had not happened earlier. For a child of Anne-Hilarion's tender years to have been through so much without the occurrence of something of the sort would have been phenomenal, had his companion paused to think of it. But the little boy was so sedate in his ways that he gave the impression of being older than he was, and La Vireville was not experienced as a nurse. However, some explanation of this seizure did dawn upon him after a moment.

"My poor little rabbit ! " he exclaimed, putting his arm round him. "There, don't cry so—it is all right ! You will soon see Elspeth again ; and meanwhile, here is your uncle to look after you."

But the little rabbit did not, apparently, want even his adoptive uncle. He burrowed yet farther into the cushions of the carriage, his whole body convulsed with weeping. Fragmentary ejaculations of "Papa !

Papa!" mingled with appeals for his grandfather and for Elspeth emerged from his sobs, which now started to partake of the character of screams. His grief was getting beyond his control, and La Vireville began to be alarmed. Not only did he think that such abandonment of distress must be bad for the child, to whose nature it seemed so foreign, but it also occurred to him that a passer-by, or even possibly the postilion, hearing such testimony of affliction, and becoming curious as to what was going forward in the chaise, might institute an investigation which could hardly fail of being disastrous. Anne in this state would certainly give the impression that he was being kidnapped—by his rescuer. The émigré pulled up the window nearest to him, which was open, and redoubled his efforts to quiet the boy.

"I want to go home!" screamed Anne. "I want Papa! I want Papa! I want my goldfish!" He beat with his fists against the dingy cushions, and even repulsed his dear Chevalier's attempts at consolation. Fortuné hardly knew him for the same child.

And meanwhile they were slowing down at the entrance to Villers-Bocage, a small place which would not have called for this attention but for the fact that the whole infant population appeared to be at play upon the road, thereby causing their pace to slacken.

"Anne, you *must* be quiet!" said his 'uncle,' giving him a little shake, and speaking with a severity which he had never thought to employ towards him.

He might as well have tried to restrain a thunderstorm; he had better have been dealing with a refractory Chouan. Anne was now physically incapable of obeying him, nor were the narrow confines of the chaise sufficient to enclose the torrents of his woe.

La Vireville's heart sank as the vehicle came to a standstill, and in another moment the head of the postilion, a Norman youth with a flaming crop of hair, appeared like a setting sun at the window. La

Vireville instantly motioned to him to proceed. The youth continued to make signs outside the glass, while other heads, of a rustic type, began to gather behind him. At last, rapidly losing his temper, La Vireville let down the glass.

"What the devil have you pulled up for?" he demanded. "Go on, confound you! We don't want to stop here!"

"I thought something was wrong," responded the youth, though how he could have heard anything through the beat of his horses' hoofs was hard to say. But by now Anne's lamentations, flowing through the opened window, were convincing the inhabitants of the little town that the postilion's surmise was just.

"There is nothing whatever wrong," asserted La Vireville shortly, and, on the surface, mendaciously. "Drive on at once!" And he began to pull up the window.

Ere he could fulfil his intention a large, knotted hand was laid upon it, and its frame became the setting for another study in genre—a large, solemn, be-whiskered old face surmounted by a hat of ancient fashion decorated with a tricolour cockade. The sight of this emblem, and still more of the parti-coloured sash crossing its wearer's breast, caused in the Chouan an outburst of silent blasphemy. From absurd the situation had become dangerous. The worst had come upon them—the intervention of officialdom—and that in a place where they need never have encountered it but for Anne-Hilarion's unfortunate access of woe.

"Well, citizen, and why have you stopped here?" demanded this apparition.

"Parbleu, citizen, that is just what I want to know!" ejaculated the émigré, a trifle taken aback. "The postilion took it into his head to pull up without orders, because he said he heard my little nephew crying—as you perceive."

"In truth, I do perceive it," returned the ancient

drily, with his hand to his ear to catch La Vireville's reply through the all-pervading sound of sobbing. "And what is he crying for?"

Since La Vireville could hardly reply, "Because he is suddenly overcome with longing for his émigré father and his English grandfather in London, whither I am taking him," he said, much more tamely, "Because, citizen, he is tired, and perhaps a little hungry."

The old man bent his gaze upon Anne, who, looking up at that moment, suspended a howl to return the compliment. "Poor child!" he said unexpectedly. "You are in haste, citizen?"

"Oh, so-so," replied La Vireville. It did not seem altogether desirable to admit that he was, very much in haste.

"You have come from far?"

"Only from Caen this morning. Do you wish to see my papers, citizen procureur-syndic?" For the Chouan guessed that he spoke with that official—in less Republican phrase, the mayor.

"Presently," said the other. "For the moment I was going to suggest that as my daughter is, I know, preparing some excellent soup for déjeuner, and since the little boy is crying because he is hungry . . ."

"You are too kind, citizen," said La Vireville, at once touched, astonished, and full of a wish that he had not ascribed Anne's tears to a quite problematical appetite. "But I fear that, though not unduly pressed, we can hardly spare the time to get out. And indeed we have some food with us."

"But not good hot soup, I feel sure," said this benevolent old mayor. "See, I will send for a bowl of it while you show me your papers. One of my grandchildren here shall go for it. Here, Toinette, run off to your mother and tell her——" The rest was lost as he turned away from the window.

"I don't want any soup," immediately said (like a later famous character) Anne-Hilarion. He spoke peevishly, and, what was much worse, in English.

The apparition of the unknown official had distinctly sobered him, but he was still intermittently heaving with sobs.

"My child," interposed La Vireville in the same tongue, since he dared not say it in French, "I have told you before that you *must* not talk English!" And he went on quickly in his own language, "Take the bowl of soup when it comes, to please this kind old man, and then we shall be able to go on again."

"But I don't want it!" repeated Anne—reverting, however, to French. Then he added, just as the procureur-syndic was turning back to the window again, "Why must I not talk English, M. le Chevalier?"

"Oh, untamable tongue of childhood!" thought the luckless Chouan. Anne had called him by his title too! The situation hung on the mayor's deafness. La Vireville frowned at Anne, said meaningly in a low tone, "Thy *uncle* wishes thee to drink the soup, Annibal!" and immediately after, in a loud one to the old man, "Will the citizen procureur-syndic see my papers now? He will find them in good order." For on that score at least, since his interview at Caen, he was happy.

As the citizen expressed his desire and readiness to do so without any demur, it seemed clear that he had not caught the child's remarks, so that Fortuné was not called upon to put into practice the wild expedients which had scurried through his fertile brain—as, to assert that his proper name was Chevalier (which would not be borne out by those papers in the name of Duchâtel) or (on the chance that the sound of English was unfamiliar to the procureur-syndic) that Anne-Hilarion had been pedantically brought up to speak Latin on occasions. He began to pull out his papers and was preparing to leave the chaise, when the mayor suggested that he should enter instead, and since the traveller could find no good reason against this, he gathered the now tearless Anne-Hilarion out

of the way—for there were only two seats—and set him on his knee, while the old man got out his spectacles and wetted his thumb for the proper perusal of the documents.

Then the soup came, borne by an elderly, responsible person of about ten. Neither she, however, nor the train of smaller fry who accompanied her were exempt from curiosity, and clambered up on both steps of the chaise to witness its consumption. Anne received the refreshment with resignation. It was all very kind and homely and unexpected, this gift from the enemy, but if anybody ever realised the discomfort caused by coals of fire on the head, it was M. de la Vireville. Nor was he unaware of the ludicrousness of his position, conscious that possible pursuers on the road from Caen might overtake them because their postchaise, instead of hastening towards the coast, was stationary in the *place* of Villers-Bocage, while a little boy unwillingly drank soup in the company of th e official who ought to be arresting them.

The old mayor, who was taken with Anne because, as he explained, his numerous grandchildren were mostly girls, would plainly have liked to talk to him—a proceeding which, in the child's present unnerved state, would surely have resulted in some disastrous revelation or other. But Anne, for once, was not inclined to converse, and also there was the soup to be disposed of. Never, to La Vireville's knowledge, had soup been so hot in this world ; it seemed to him that it must have been specially heated by demons in a lower, so long did it take to consume.

At last—at long last—the ordeal was over, the nearly empty bowl handed back to Toinette, her train ejected from the steps, the postilion on his horse, the charitable old procureur-syndic back, smiling, on the stones of the *place*. The horses jerked forward . . .

"Well, nephew Annibal," began La Vireville, "of all the uncomfortable quarters of an hour——" But nephew Annibal, worn out by emotion and full

of good soup, had fallen instantly asleep like a puppy, his head against the Chouan's breast.

(3)

Fortuné shifted the child so that he should lie more comfortably. Tear-stains were on Anne-Hilarion's cheeks, and round his mouth traces of the refreshment which his harassed uncle had forced upon his appetite. "Pauvre mioche!" thought 'Monsieur Augustin,' looking down at the head now resting on his arm. And he thought also, "I never knew he had it in him to be so troublesome!"

For himself, he fell into reflection over recent events —the first opportunity, so it seemed to him, that he had had to review them in quiet, for on board the *Trois Frères*, a peaceable enough refuge in itself, he felt always on the point of having to talk to the captain or to fend off awkward inquiries. Yet it was in the captain's cabin, after breakfast that first morning, that Anne had given him a more or less detailed account of happenings at Rose Cottage; how M. Duchâtel had taken him to the Cathedral and had been very friendly and talkative, and of the particularly sound sleep which had come upon him, Anne-Hilarion, that evening. It had needed questioning to bring out the story of Mlle. Angèle's nasty-tasting posset, for he was too innocent to connect that draught with his slumbers. No details, however, could be furnished of the departure from Dover, anxious as Fortuné was to obtain them, for the simple reason that the small traveller had not wakened up till midway between England and France, in what he had reported to be "a little ship, not so big as this." From what he could gather La Vireville thought it must have been a lugger, Heaven knew how procured.

On arrival at Calais, M. Duchâtel appeared to have conveyed Anne, frightened, as he admitted, but still

somewhat stupefied, to a private house—unidentifiable from the child's description—to have put him to bed and left him behind a locked door, lest, as he put it, his father's enemies should break in and steal him away. For he had told Anne that he was taking him to France by his father's wish, expressed through the old ladies, his father's friends, and the child had believed him. So Anne thought he was going to Verona, and at first was not ill-pleased.

It had been, he thought, afternoon when he had been imprisoned in this way at Calais, and yet they had not left that town till next day ; of that Anne was positive. He could give no reason for the delay. La Vireville was driven to suppose that Duchâtel had some secret service business of his own in Calais—possibly unknown to Mme. de Chaulnes, who had spoken so exultantly about the twenty-four hours' start. Moreover, he probably little expected to be pursued so soon. But the delay in Calais had been providential from Fortuné's point of view. He could not help wondering now, for a second or two, whether, supposing the pursued to be at present hunting the pursuer, the soup episode might not prove as providential from Duchâtel's.

That was all the conversation which he and Anne had had on the point at the time, owing to the advent of a sailor into the cabin ; but later, that evening in fact, as Anne was looking over the side at the water, tinged with sunset, which heaved slowly past, he suddenly said :

" The ship I came from England in moved about more than this, M. le Chevalier."

" Mon oncle," corrected La Vireville, looking round to see if anyone was in earshot. " Did it, Annibal ? Were you frightened ? "

" I was down in a cabin," said Anne. " I could not see the sea then. But I knew I was in a ship. And I thought "—he paused, and then went on—" I thought you were drowned, mon oncle and that it was my fault."

"Thought I was drowned, child? How could that be—and why should it be your fault?"

"Like my dream," said the little boy, staring hard over the bulwark at the sea. "You were drowned because . . . because I . . . I told *them* things about you." His face was scarlet.

"Well, my child," said the émigré, putting his arm round him, "it does not matter so much if you did." And, seeing signs of still greater emotional discomfort, he embellished this questionable statement. "It does not matter the scratch of a pin. I like to be talked about, Anne—it's a failing of mine! . . . But everybody doesn't, you know, little one. Did you tell them much about anybody else?"

Anne had put his knuckles into his eyes, and in a small and faltering voice had confessed that he had talked about M. de Soucy and a little about M. l'Abbé, because 'they,' the old ladies, were Papa's friends, and he did not know . . .

La Vireville took him on to his knee, and after waiting to see that the captain was not really coming right up to them, whispered to him not to cry. "You are not to blame, child," he went on. "Those old ladies cheated you, as they have cheated older and wiser folk. But there is one thing—a place, not a person . . . I wonder if you told them the name of the place where the expedition is going to land? Can you remember if you did?"

His tone was very gentle as he put the question through Anne's rather tangled curls into his ear, but there was a lively anxiety in his eyes.

"I could not remember," sighed the little boy almost apologetically. "I tried. They said they would give me a crown piece for my money-box if I could. I cannot remember it now."

"Don't try!" said La Vireville hastily, thanking his Maker, though not doubting that the name would eventually be known through some other agency.

"And I said," proceeded Anne, "that if I could

remember it I would not tell them—no, that part came in my dream, where the Queen of Elfland was in the boat," he corrected conscientiously. "I said, really, that I often forgot names and remembered them, sometimes, afterwards."

"And did they ask you afterwards? Did M. Duchâtel ask you?"

It appeared that the old ladies had asked him afterwards, and that M. Duchâtel's solicitude on the point, though vain, had been extreme all the way from Calais to Abbeville. But M. Duchâtel had never, it seemed, been actually unkind (it would not have suited his book, thought La Vireville), and it was not till the episode of the Citizen Pourcelles' declamation that the Verona idea had lost its hold on Anne's mind. But then, child though he was, he had gathered from the turgid but unequivocal statements of the 'Ode' that he was not in the company of those who could in any way be described as 'Papa's friends.'

Yet, except for that final shower of tears at Abbeville, it did not appear that the kidnapper had ever had any trouble with the little boy. The rescuer, now, could not say so much.

CHAPTER XI

"FIFTY FATHOMS DEEP"

(I)

"WE shall never make Jersey with this wind," said the young fisherman.

"We *must*!" replied La Vireville firmly. "We could run for Gorey if St. Helier is impossible."

The Norman shrugged his shoulders under his faded guernsey. "Much more likely to be blown into St. Malo! She makes a great deal of leeway."

The subject of their conversation lay before them at that moment on the beach, an open sixteen-foot fisherman's boat, broad in the beam, ballasted with stones, and lug-rigged. The unlucky north-east wind, strong and steady, whipped La Vireville's cloak about him, and caused him to put a hasty hand to his hat. It was about nine of the spring evening and very dusk. The lights of the upper town of Granville showed about three miles to the left, along the crest of the high rock that jutted out into the sea, and a scrap of an undesired moon served to emphasise the rate at which the clouds were driving over the sky.

"At any rate we must put to sea," said the émigré, determined to waste no more words. "Get the boat ready, and I will fetch the child, and then help you down with her. Wherever the wind may drive us to, we cannot remain here."

He spoke no less than the truth. There had been a very unpleasant little scene on leaving Vire that morning, from which the Chouan had managed to

extricate Anne and himself only by the liberal distribution of bribes. He had been driven to employ the same unsatisfactory method with regard also to their postilion, dismissing him in unusual and suspicious fashion outside Granville. Although the youth (plied in addition by his fare with much strong drink) had promised not to take the empty postchaise into the town, but to return with sealed lips on the road whence he had come, and though his start on that road had actually been witnessed, it was more than probable that he was, at the very moment, back in Granville, if not laying information against his late passengers, at least babbling about them over his cups. Hasty departure was therefore imperative, but the situation of St. Valéry-sur-Somme seemed to be reproduced, with a difference. This time fate (or, in this particular, La Vireville's knowledge) had brought the travellers to a maison de confiance—one of the chain of secret Royalist refuges which stretched along the roads from the coast—had given them a well-disposed fisherman, its master, and a convenient boat, but had denied the wind necessary to the thirty miles that lay between them and Jersey.

François, the fisherman in question, shrugged his shoulders again. "Very well, if you insist. You know the risks you are running. If we weather Chausey, we may be blown on to the Minquiers."

"My friend," retorted La Vireville, "they are nothing to the risks we run by remaining. I prefer the hospitality of the plateau des Minquiers to that of Granville prison. Shall I give you a hand with the boat?"

In the little cottage on the shore the fisherman's young wife was sitting with Anne-Hilarion, very drowsy, on her knee.

"Monsieur," she said, as her husband and the émigré came in, "it is wicked to take this baby to sea on such a night!"

"For that, Madame," replied La Vireville, "you must blame the women who sent him over to France."

The young woman kissed the sleepy little boy and rose with him in her arms.

"I will carry him down to the boat," she said. "You will have your hands full. There is the water-keg, François, and a basket of provisions. If you get within sight of Jersey this time to-morrow you will be lucky. You have the compass—and the nets?"

"Nets!" exclaimed La Vireville. "Ah, I understand." It was as well to have some ostensible reason for being at sea.

They went down the beach, all laden in their way, for even Anne, half asleep though he was, clutched in one hand the foreign shell which the master of the *Trois Frères* had given him. In spite of the strong wind there were no breakers of sufficient force to make launching difficult. The fisherman's wife deposited her burden and helped to run the boat down. Then she went back, picked up the child, and gave him into the arms of La Vireville, where he stood knee-deep in the swirling water, with François holding on to the boat on the other side.

"Madame, I thank you for lending me your husband," said the Chouan, as he took the boy from her.

"It is only because of *this*," she answered, indicating the child.

"I know that, but I do not thank you any the less." He put Anne-Hilarion over the side and scrambled on board himself. François followed his example, and began to push off.

"Take the tiller, Monsieur," he said, "and I will hoist the sail. Au revoir, la femme!"

The wind carried away his wife's farewell. Rocking violently at first on the swell, the boat gradually steadied and gathered way as the lug-sail shot up, and at last, close-hauled, she was making her way out of

the bay, and La Vireville and his charge were really leaving their native shores.

"Enfin!" exclaimed the former, and as François was now at liberty to steer, he relinquished the tiller and took Anne-Hilarion in his arms.

Once out of the lee of the land the full force of the wind was apparent. The *Marie-François*—in such manner did the fishing-boat combine the names of her owner and his wife—lay over to it; in the gloom the water rushed white past the gunwale (there was no coaming), and La Vireville had some ado to keep himself and the child in place on the weather side.

"You see!" shouted François, and he eased her a point or two.

He was laying the usual course for Jersey, to the northward of Granville, by the Passage de la Déroute. But the wind was strongly against them, and on their lee, to the left, as they both knew, lay the miles and miles of shoals and broken, half-submerged rocks and islets of the Iles Chausey and the Minquiers, so treacherous a network of reefs that for thirty miles out from the French coast in their direction there was no water more than ten fathoms deep, and few channels that were safe. It was true that this was not the direction which the voyagers wished to take, but it was, unfortunately, the direction of the steadily-increasing wind.

From time to time La Vireville struck a light, looked at the compass and reported, and François would take measures accordingly. On the other tack, however, the *Marie-François* did not sail so well. After some couple of hours spent in these unprofitable manœuvres, during which they had only progressed a very few miles, La Vireville permitted himself to remark on this fact, and to say resignedly that he supposed they must make up their minds between being driven on to the rocks of Chausey or revisiting the Norman mainland. For himself he preferred Chausey.

"I told you that she made much leeway," replied

the owner of the *Marie-François* rather sulkily. "If she were a bigger boat we might change our course and ride out under the Iles Chausey till morning, when the wind will probably abate, but she is too small for that. Or, if the tide were making, we could find our way inside to the natural harbour that there is by the Grande Ile (always supposing there were no vessels of the Blues doing the same). But the ebb has already begun, and if we got in there we could not get out again, for the channels would be dry."

La Vireville, with Anne huddled up in his arms, reflected. He had sailed too often in just such a small craft between Brittany and Jersey not to know its limitations.

"Then I am afraid we must give up the idea of making Jersey and run for the coast of Brittany," he said at last. "I know it very well between Cap Fréhel and St. Brieuc. In fact"—he hesitated a moment—"I have a command thereabouts. With this wind we could make that part of the coast easily—provided that we are not sighted in the morning by the Blues, either at sea or ashore."

"Very well," agreed the Norman. "Our best plan will be to go between Chausey and the Minquiers. It is dangerous."

"It is better than returning," insisted Fortuné. "I suppose you know the channels well? And we should get some shelter from the lee of the islands of Chausey."

So they went about, and presently the little boat was engaged, in the darkness and the high wind, among that archipelago of dreary and dangerous reefs, of which some rose like needles out of the sea, and some, more deadly still, were only visible at low water. Of such were the most perilous of all, Les Ardentes, which lay in wait at the entry of the passage. And the moon would put aside the flying clouds for a moment, to show them the surf boiling white round some evil splinter of rock standing up in the channel like

a warning finger, or the water sucking greedily over an unseen slab of granite. Only François' consummate steering, his steady nerves, and, perhaps, the luck which sometimes attends those who challenge risks, got them safely through. La Vireville kept Anne's eyes covered the whole time.

Even when they were through conditions were not agreeable. When François had set the course fairly for the coast of Brittany they felt the full violence of the wind again, this time, it was true, no longer in their teeth. The sorely-buffeted *Marie-François*, obliged unceasingly to tack to avoid being driven on to the St. Malo coast, shipped every few minutes a little water, flung half-contemptuously into her by a snarling wave. About two in the morning it became bitingly cold. La Vireville had long ago taken off his cloak to wrap round Anne, and finally he made a kind of bundle of him and put him right in the bows, where, in spite of the lobster-pots and the smell of fish and tarred rope, he thought the child would get more shelter than in the stern. Frightened and sea-sick, the little boy did, however, fall now and again into slumber of a sort, when La Vireville could turn an undivided attention to the management of the sails or to baling.

Thus the night wore on, and at last, as the dawn brightened on the grey, heaving waters, the coast of Brittany was visible on their left. The wind, now considerably abated, had gone round several points towards the north, and had St. Malo been their objective instead of the spot they particularly wished to avoid, they could have run before it for that harbour. As it was, they must make farther along the coast for the little bay which La Vireville had in view. It was true that, owing to the change in the wind, they would have difficulty in reaching this point before sunrise, and a man with a price on his head, like La Vireville, does not of preference select full daylight to land on a guarded coast, in precisely that region of it

where he may with most probability be expected to land; but there was no help for it. There was always the bare possibility of falling in with one of the Jersey luggers before they got there, and thus making their landing unnecessary. Moreover, a sort of informal armistice was supposed to be in existence at the moment, on account of negotiations for a settlement then going forward between Republicans and Royalists in the west, though La Vireville pinned very little trust to the truce in question.

The unwished-for sun was already rising when Anne-Hilarion, rather wan, was fetched from his place of retirement and persuaded to try to eat something. He displayed small interest and no disappointment on learning that he was being taken to Brittany instead of to Jersey. When this information was being imparted to him the fishing-boat was already edging in towards the coast—a coast of cliffs and bays equally asleep in the early sunshine, whence, so her crew hoped, her small size and her inconspicuous brown sail would save her from observation. After the night of cold and peril the change of atmosphere was not unwelcome. In another half-hour, with luck, they would reach the little bay La Vireville had in mind.

The émigré was just coaxing Anne to finish a slice of bread at which he was languidly nibbling when François bent forward from the tiller and said a couple of words ·

"The Blues!"

La Vireville followed his pointing finger. On the low cliff a little ahead of them, which they would shortly pass to port, was a small wooden building, and, pacing up and down in front of it, a man in uniform with a musket over his shoulder.

The Chouan and the fisherman looked at one another. They could not hope, at so short a distance, to escape notice, unless the sentry were blind; the question was whether, in view of the truce, he would or would not consider their craft suspicious. On their

present course every moment brought them nearer to the headland, and consequently within better range, while if they tacked and stood out to sea they ran the chance both of attracting more attention and of giving evidence of an uneasy conscience.

"We had better continue as we are, eh?" remarked La Vireville.

François nodded.

"I am going to put you back in the bows, Anne," said the émigré. "It is warmer there." And, catching him up, he went forward with him over the uneven stone ballast and deposited him as low as possible among the lobster-pots and nets. The coast was hidden from his own view by the lug-sail, and he could not see what was passing there. The *Marie-François* held on at a good speed.

"He has seen us," observed François after a moment. A sort of smile flickered over his face, and he pulled the mainsheet a little tighter round the thwart.

La Vireville came back and stood by the mast. They were now abreast of the guardhouse. "He has roused the others," said François grimly. "He was not blind, that parishioner, worse luck!"

And with the words came the sound of a shout from the cliff, then of a shot. A bullet splashed into their wake a yard or so behind them.

Fortuné de la Vireville shrugged his shoulders. They were very obviously not out of range. But neither he nor the Norman had any impulse to bring to, which was evidently the course intimated by the bullet.

"So much for the truce!" he said aloud, and as the words left his mouth came a second and more menacing crackle from the cliff. At the same moment La Vireville was conscious of a violent blow on the side of the head—so violent, indeed, that it threw him off his balance. He had a lightning impression, compound of resentment and surprise, that the yard had

been hit and had fallen on him. And then, suddenly, in the midst of the sunshine, it was night. . . .

(2)

La Vireville opened his eyes. It was day again, bright sunlight. The *Marie-François* was bounding forward before a spanking breeze. For a second or two La Vireville could not remember why he was there—hardly, indeed, who he was. Then he looked up instinctively at the yard. It was there, unharmed, at the top of the brown, swelling sail. He himself was half lying, half sitting on the seat that ran round the gunwale, and everything was as before, the helmsman at the tiller——

The helmsman!

"My God!" said La Vireville aloud. The fisherman was indeed sitting in the sternsheets, his arm over the tiller; but he was sitting in a heap, and his face was upturned to the sky. Under the tiller was a red pool shifting with the motion of the boat. The Chouan stared at him horror-struck. "My God!" he said again. "He's been hit. . . . Anne, Anne, where are you?"

Only then did he become aware of something clutching tightly one of his legs, and, looking down, saw the child clinging there, his face hidden. The émigré moved to take him in his arms, and was instantly conscious that he was very dizzy and that there was blood on the breast of his own coat. "Ciel! did they get me too?" he wondered, and putting up a hand to his head withdrew it with a reddened palm. How long ago did it all happen? There was the coast, but no guardhouse. It must be out of sight now behind the headland. The wind had taken them on, the dead hand had steered them—if indeed François were dead? He must see to him first.

"Anne—my little pigeon, my comrade, it is all

right!" he said, stooping to him. At the sound of his voice the child lifted his head, took one look at him, and screamed. La Vireville then realised that there must be blood down his face, and, pulling out his handkerchief, did his best to remove it. Afterwards he twisted the handkerchief hurriedly round his head, in which, so far as he knew, there might be a bullet, though he inclined to think that it was a ball ricochetting off the mast which had given him a glancing blow. Otherwise he would hardly be alive to speculate about it. Not that there was any time just then for speculation. . . . Anne-Hilarion suffered himself to be lifted on to his friend's knee, and, shuddering convulsively, hid his face once more in his breast. La Vireville comforted him as well as he could, trying hastily to dissipate the terror which seemed to have frozen him, for he could not devote much time to consolation now, when François might be bleeding to death. So he soon lifted the little boy off his knee, and put him down facing the bows, telling him not to look round; and Anne, sobbing now as if his heart would break, leant his head on the gunwale, and so remained.

But François was quite dead. He had fallen back and died instantly, so the Chouan judged, shot, probably, through the heart. It was for this, thought La Vireville, that he had dragged him from his wife. . . . He pulled the body with difficulty away from the tiller, laid it on the ballast, spread over it a small spare mizen, and sat down at the helm to think. But he found himself looking rather hopelessly at the mess of blood below the tiller; something must be done to it, for the sake of the little boy who had been through so much. He found a rag under the seat, and with this converted the pool into a smear, and then perceived that, still bleeding himself from the head, he was leaving wherever he moved a further series of bright splashes. "I must stop that," he thought, and took stronger measures with a piece of sailcloth hacked off the mizen.

But all the while he was aware of strange momentary gaps in consciousness, though his brain was clear enough. At any cost, he must not lose his senses again—or if he must, let it at least be on land. Only an extraordinary coincidence had saved the *Marie-François* from being blown on to the rocks or out to sea. Anne was still sobbing; the time to comfort him was not yet come. The pressing need was to make a decision while he yet could. Fortunately he knew his whereabouts exactly. . . . After a few moments' thought he made the decision, altered the boat's course a trifle, and, sitting there steering with the dead fisherman at his feet, began gently to talk to Anne at the other end of the boat.

And so, presently, the sun shining, the waves slapping her sides, and the lug-sail wide with the following wind, the *Marie-François* began to make for the cliffs, just where a spit of rock ran out at their feet and they sloped to a little cove. Here there was only a lazy swell that stirred the long seaweed, for it was half-tide.

"We are going ashore here, child," said La Vireville, letting down the sail. "You will not see this boat again." For he meant to sink her if it could be done; she was too clear an indication of their whereabouts, and here, so near his own command, he would have small difficulty in getting another boat for Jersey, and men to sail her, too, more capable of the task than he felt at present.

White, dishevelled, and tear-stained, the little boy got off the seat. "Are we to get out now?" he asked uncertainly, as the sail came down with a run.

"Yes, little one, and be careful that you do not slip," said the émigré, putting him over the side on to the rock, and scrambling after him. Once there he spread his cloak on the seaweed. "Now sit quiet for a moment," he went on, in a business-like tone, "and take care of these things for me." He put the water-keg, the compass, and what remained of the provisions beside him, and armed himself with an oar.

"I am not going to leave you, Anne," he said. "I am only going to the end of this rock; but I want you to look at the compass carefully while I am away, so that when I come back in a minute or two you will be able to tell me which is the north. Will you?"

"Yes, M. le Chevalier," responded Anne, and averted his eyes not unwillingly from La Vireville's bandaged head to the still-swinging compass-card.

With the oar La Vireville manœuvred the boat farther out along the spit of rock, where she would catch a better wind for his purpose. Then he clambered on board again, and, lifting the sail, looked regretfully at the young, sunburnt face beneath. Thinking of the dead fisherman's wife, he turned out his pockets; there was nothing there but a claspknife and a twist of tobacco, but round his neck was a medal, and on his finger a silver ring, and these he took. Then with a rope he lashed the body to the thwarts and made fast the tiller. The last thing was done with an auger from the locker. Hastily he then hoisted the sail, scrambled back on to the rock, and pushed the boat off with the oar.

Slowly at first, then faster as the breeze caught her, the *Marie-François* moved away. Her executioner had bored only small holes, so that she should be well out in the bay before her doom came upon her; but she was settling little by little as she went. She began at last to lie over to the wind, and that hastened the end; the water without and the water within met over the gunwale; she heeled suddenly over, struggled to right herself, heeled over again . . . and was gone. The brown sail lay a second or two on the water, then it followed the rest, and the *Marie-François* and her master went down to the bottom of the bay.

An oar, a loose spar, some indeterminate objects, and a couple of lobster-pots bobbed on the surface of the waves as La Vireville, dizzy with pain and regret, made his way back over the seaweed to the forlorn, frightened child for whom these two lives had just been thrown away.

CHAPTER XII

INTRODUCING GRAIN D'ORGE

(I)

ANNE-HILARION was still sitting obediently on the cloak, staring at the now stationary compass. La Vireville stooped and kissed him before he had time to ask any questions. "Anne, you have been a very brave little boy! Now you will go on being brave, will you not? The fisherman and his boat have gone home; you will not see them any more. But we do not need them, because for the rest of the day we are going to stay here, in a cave that I know of. You can help me to carry these things to it. Mind you do not slip on the seaweed!"

Employment, of whatever kind, was exactly the tonic needed by the child at the moment. He picked up the nearly empty basket of food and followed the émigré, who carried the water-keg and the compass. The sea whispered up the side of the rock, lifting the seaweed. "Be very careful," adjured La Vireville over his shoulder. "Here we are. I expect you have never been in a cave before?"

Only just above high-water mark, of a slit-like entrance so narrow that La Vireville, stooping, could only just squeeze through, and with even this entrance partly screened by a projecting rock, the cave opened out within to respectable proportions. The Chevalier de la Vireville had not, in fact, been guided, in his choice of a landing-place, entirely by the fact of his mishap, which made an immediate haven a necessity,

nor by the knowledge that the soldiers on the cliff might very possibly come along in pursuit. The thought of this very spot had visited his mind once or twice earlier on the voyage.

Anne hesitated a moment, rather daunted by the darkness, so La Vireville set down his burdens and took him by the hand.

"It will soon get lighter," he said cheerfully. "Come and sit down by me." He disposed his own long legs with some haste upon the sandy floor, for his head was swimming so much that he feared to fall.

Anne came willingly enough and nestled up to him. "We are quite safe now, are we not, M. le Chevalier?"

"Quite," said Fortuné, with his arm round him. "And I think the best thing we could do would be to go to sleep, don't you, nephew?"

"I am in effect very sleepy," said Anne, leaning his head against him with a sigh. A moment's silence, and he went on, in a changed voice, as if against his will, "I was frightened . . . there was blood . . . you too, and the fisherman——"

"Of course you were frightened for a moment," interrupted the émigré, holding him tighter. "But listen, my little pigeon, and I will explain it all. The soldiers on the cliff fired at us, as you know, and a bullet hit François the fisherman, and because it hurt him very much, he fainted—you understand? At the same time your uncle got a blow on the head from another bullet, which hit the mast first and then knocked him down. But, you see, he is quite recovered now. In the same way, when François had lain down a little in the bottom of the boat he felt better again, and after you and I had got out of her he was able to sail her back home; for, you know, with this wind and in the daylight we should never have got to Jersey to-day. We shall go at night, when the soldiers can't see us. So you see, mon petit, that there is nothing to be alarmed at now, and as for hearing shots and

seeing . . . a little blood . . . you must remember that you too will fight for the King some day ! "

" Yes," said the little boy. " Unless I write a big book like Grandpapa."

" Well, whatever you do, you must never let yourself be frightened."

" I suppose that you and Papa are never frightened ? " deduced Anne.

" Never ! " responded La Vireville firmly. (" Heaven forgive me for a liar ! " he added inwardly.)

" Then I will try not to be," announced Anne, with another sigh, and, to the Chouan's relief, he settled down against him, and almost instantly fell asleep.

As for La Vireville, he remained for some time in the same position, his back against the rocky wall of the cave, looking down at the brown head with its heavy silken curls that rested confidingly against his redingote, and reflecting on the chance that had given him so unusual a companion in these regions. This cave had known in the past year very different occupants, for it had served, and would shortly serve again, as a dépôt for arms and ammunition, smuggled in under cover of night from Jersey, and smuggled out again, in the same conditions, by the Chouans of the parishes which he commanded in the neighbourhood. He touched one of the soft ringlets that held so many gleams of gold in their brown, then, very cautiously, so as not to disturb the sleeper, he slipped down at full length on the floor of the cave, taking Anne with him in an encircling arm, and, pillowing his own aching head on the other, tried to follow his example.

(2)

During the afternoon Anne-Hilarion woke up, in a mood for converse, and with his sleep his late adventures seemed, temporarily at least, blotted from his mind. Having eaten, he made inquiries after La

Vireville's head, but instead of reviving the question of how he got the hurt, branched off into an account of Baptiste's calamitous fall off a ladder at some undated epoch, and the large swelling on his forehead which was the result. From this topic he entered that of a gathered finger once sustained by Elspeth, which had, she said, pained her right up to her shoulder, and to which a succession of poultices had been applied. La Vireville rather absently remarking that it would be impossible to make poultices at present, nothing but seaweed being available for the purpose, Anne, for some reason, found this observation so exquisitely humorous that he laughed over it for a long time.

"If we were wrecked on a desert island, like Robinson Crusoe, of whom Grandpapa has read to me," he concluded, "we might have to make poultices of seaweed. Perhaps we might even have to eat it. Do you know about Robinson Crusoe, M. le Chevalier?"

"No," answered Fortuné drowsily. "Tell me about him."

Anne told him, to the appropriate sound of the waves without.

"One hears the sea in here," he remarked at the end. "But not so much as last night. Last night it was as it says in 'Noroway-over-the-foam':

> "'The lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,
> And gurly grew the sea . . .'"

And he added, crooning the words to himself:

> "'Half owre, half owre to Aberdour
> 'Tis fifty fathoms deep;
> And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens
> Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.'"

"Whatever are you talking about, child?" asked La Vireville uneasily, coming out of his doze.

But Anne went on, apparently fascinated by the words, and not much thinking of their meaning,

which had on a past occasion so much distressed him:

"'O lang, lang may the ladies sit,
Wi' their fans into their hand,
Before they see Sir Patrick Spens
Come sailing to the strand!

'And lang, lang may the maidens sit
Wi' their gowd kames in their hair,
A-waiting for their ain dear loves!
For them they'll see nae mair.'"

La Vireville winced, and his hand went to the medal and the ring in his pocket.

"Your selection of poetry is not very cheerful, my small friend," he remarked.

Anne-Hilarion looked at him with large eyes of surprise. "Do you not like it, M. le Chevalier? I think it has so pleasant a sound. But I expect your head aches a good deal, does it not? Then I will not say any more of it. That is the end, I think." He had been sitting on a pile of dried seaweed at a little distance, whence he could see out of the cave entrance; now he got up, and came and slipped his hand into his friend's. "If you wish to sleep, M. le Chevalier——"

"You will play sentry, eh?" finished La Vireville, smiling up at him. "Very well, only you must promise on no account to go outside the cave. We shall leave it as soon as it is dark. That is," he added to himself, "if this accursed head of mine is steady enough for me to walk by then." For he was beginning to fear that it might not be, and it was therefore with relief that he accepted Anne's suggestion, and closed his eyes again.

Left to his own devices, the Comte de Flavigny sat for quite a long time solemnly and sympathetically regarding his prostrate companion—rather as that companion had, earlier, studied him. M. le Chevalier looked so long, lying there, longer even, Anne thought,

than when he was on his feet. Then the watcher got up and proceeded to make a careful tour round his domain. A meticulous search yielded nothing of more interest than an empty water-keg, similar to their own, abandoned in a corner. Having exhausted the hopeful emotions of this quest, Anne looked longingly at the entrance of the cave, whence he could see a slit of sea and sky, and hear the waves and the gulls. He desired greatly to go out, but his promise rendered that impossible. So he returned to his heap of seaweed, and wondered if François the fisherman had got nearly home by now; for he did not in the least doubt the explanation of recent events that had been given him, though he did not much care to dwell upon them. Then he thought of his grandfather, and speculated as to what he was doing; he thought also of Elspeth, and Baptiste, and the exotic Lal Khan. He would soon be seeing them again now.

M. le Chevalier stirred in his sleep—if indeed he were really asleep, of which Anne was not sure—threw out an arm, and said something that sounded angry.

Suddenly Anne bethought him that he had not said his prayers since . . . he could not exactly remember when. So he knelt down on the seaweed and applied himself to his devotions, adding a special petition on behalf of the Chevalier de la Vireville. After that he himself fell asleep again.

(3)

It was quite dark in the cave when La Vireville dragged himself to his feet and told Anne that it was time for them to be leaving it. The subsequent Odyssey was, to Anne at least, full of interest, and undoubtedly possessed more reality to him than to his half-dazed companion. After they had made their way through the narrow opening of the cave they had to scramble over many rocks full of pools

in which, so Anne opined, there might be crabs, only it was too dark to see them—even though it was not so dark outside the cave as in it. His views on their alleged presence, and the likelihood of their seizing hold of the travellers' feet and retaining them willy-nilly till the tide came up again, were discouraged by La Vireville (or at least their utterance was), and he was told that he must not speak above a whisper. So in silence they clambered, in silence they arrived upon a beach which was first sand, where the waves were coming in gently, and then pebbles, which not only made a noise but also hurt the feet. Here La Vireville picked up Anne under one arm and so carried him. Then, when they were at the top of the bank of pebbles, they had to climb a low cliff where there was a path, somewhat difficult to see. After that they were on the level, on grass, and soon after in a strange, tunnel-like lane, very deep and dark indeed, and so narrow that they could only just go abreast. Soon there were great trees growing on the banks of this lane, and it became so dark that Anne could only see a few feet in front, but M. le Chevalier went on without hesitating, though not very fast. Sometimes Anne walked by his side, his hand in his ; sometimes he was carried. Then they were out of the lane, in among more and more trees. Anne began to be tired, and M. le Chevalier seemed tired too, for he stopped and sat down occasionally, and once or twice he said things to himself which Anne did not understand.

There was some animal or bird among these trees which kept making a strange noise, and this M. le Chevalier would now and then imitate exactly. Anne asked what it was, and was told that it was an owl. After a little it seemed to Anne that there were people too in the forest, strange shadowy forms in curious garments. He commented on this, and M. le Chevalier told him not to be frightened, that they were all friends, and would do him no harm, and that it was, in fact, they who made the sound like an owl which

he had answered. And, almost as he said it, two men seemed to come up out of the ground, two men with great wide-brimmed hats and long loose hair. They each carried a gun. It was too dark to see their faces. M. de la Vireville spoke to one in a strange tongue, and then he said to Anne, "Let him carry you, little one, and don't be frightened." So the man took him up in his arms, and Anne, being tired, was glad of this, though he had to struggle against a certain amount of the alarm which he had promised to try never to feel again.

M. le Chevalier, who was of course too big to be carried, however tired he might feel, took the arm of the other man, and they went on again. And then, just as Anne was thinking that he would ask to be put down—for, after all, the man who carried him smelt almost too disagreeably—they came to a little hut roofed with branches, and one of the men knocked, and made the noise of the owl, and the door opened and they all went in.

In the hut was another man in strange dress, and here, by a couple of rushlights, Anne, when he was deposited on his feet, had his first full view of a Chouan.

By his side there stood an oldish man, not very tall, with enormously powerful shoulders and rather a short neck. On the lank, grizzled hair that fell to these shoulders was a large wide-brimmed hat; he wore the strangest breeches that Anne had ever seen, made of some dirty white material, pleated and full like a woman's skirt; from these to his sabots his legs were clad in deerskin gaiters. But his coat engaged the little boy's attention almost more, for it was blue, very short, and appeared to have another underneath it, and the front was elaborately embroidered in whorls of yellow and red. Pinned on to it was a tiny soiled square of linen, roughly worked with the emblem of the Sacred Heart, and a rosary was looped through one of the button-holes. The man's little twinkling eyes, set deep in his head, looked, Anne decided,

rather wicked, and he had never seen a face which seemed so much as if it never could be washed clean, so grey and leathery was the wrinkled skin. The Chouan carried a musket slung across his back, and a knife and two pistols in a leather belt.

M. le Chevalier, sitting on the edge of the table, with both hands to his head, now addressed this being as " Grain d'Orge," and said a few words to him in a strange language. Anne had by this time arrived at the conclusion that this was the man who had carried him, so when the lips of the being parted in what the little boy supposed to be a smile (displaying a few yellow teeth, and causing innumerable more wrinkles to appear), and it held out a large grey hand, uttering something unintelligible, Anne gathered that he was being given a friendly greeting of some kind, and with very little hesitation laid his own hand in Grain d'Orge's capacious paw.

CHAPTER XIII

FAR IN THE FOREST

(I)

"'O RICHARD, ô mon roi,
L'univers t'abandonne;
Sur la terre il n'y a que moi
Qui s'intéresse à ta personne,'"

sang a clear tenor voice in the forest next morning —the once famous air out of that opera of *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* which had served the Royalists of three or four years ago as a rallying-cry. The singer, a fair-haired young Breton with a face of refinement and intelligence, was busy polishing his English musket. He was, or had been, a law student at Rennes, and now was one of 'Monsieur Augustin's' lieutenants. A little way off Anne-Hilarion was crouched in a patch of primroses, which he was adding one by one to the tight, hot bunch in his hand. Grain d'Orge and another Chouan of about the same standard of personal cleanliness, sitting on a fallen trunk, their muskets resting against them, regarded his labours with a wide, admiring grin. And under a beech-tree, a fresh bandage round his head, La Vireville himself lay propped on his elbows, reading and re-reading a letter. A map lay open on the ground beside him. Over this peaceful and almost pastoral scene shone the young green of April's trees and the soft blue of her sky, a setting with which the child plucking flowers was more consonant than the armed peasants. But the latter, by the attention which

they paid to his movements, did not seem to find it so.

La Vireville suddenly rolled over and sat up. "Le Goffic, come here a moment, will you?"

The young Breton ceased his song, put down his weapon, and obeyed. His leader motioned to him to sit down beside him.

"You know, of course, Charles, that 'M. Alexis,' the leader of the Carhoët division, was killed the other day while I was away?"

"Yes, Monsieur Augustin."

"He seems to have been killed by treachery," said La Vireville, referring to the letter in his hand, "at a farm near Lanrivain. Let me see, where is that exactly?" He searched on the map lying beside him.

"Grain d'Orge knows that neighbourhood well," suggested his lieutenant.

"Yes, of course he does," assented the émigré, relinquishing the search. "I will ask him in a moment, since I shall have further need of his topographical knowledge. For there is another matter in this letter of M. du Boishardy's. He wishes me to take over the command of the Carhoët division, now vacant through 'M. Alexis'' death."

Now M. du Boishardy commanded the whole department of the Côtes-du-Nord for the King, and La Vireville was consequently more or less under his orders. The young Breton's face fell.

"And leave us?" he exclaimed.

"No, no! M. du Boishardy wishes me to combine the two if possible. I should have to appoint a subordinate in any case. The pressing need, however, seems to be that I should go over there in person as soon as possible, for it appears that they are all at sixes and sevens since their leader's death. I must proceed to Carhoët directly I return from Jersey—for to Jersey I must go, to see the Prince de Bouillon, even if I had not the infant there to convoy into British hands. The best plan, I take it, would be to sail direct from

Jersey to that part of the coast, if it is possible to land there. Grain d'Orge ! "

In front of that warrior, fingering his musket with one hand, was now standing Anne-Hilarion, who had abandoned his primrose-plucking, though still retaining his spoil. The old Chouan's French was very limited, for which reason conversation with him, for those ignorant of Breton, was difficult ; but he and the Comte de Flavigny did appear to be holding discourse of some kind. La Vireville's summons brought not only him but Anne and his flowers also.

" Thank you, my child," said La Vireville, accepting the hot nosegay. " Now you can go back and pick some for Grain d'Orge."

The Chouan grinned. " You wanted me, Monsieur Augustin ? "

" Yes. Sit down there. You know the Carhoët division well, don't you ? "

" Like the palm of my hand, Monsieur Augustin." He began to arrange some of Anne's primroses on the ground. " See, here is Porhoët, the little fishing village, in the Bay of St. Guénaël, and there is Carhoët, seven miles inland, and there is the wood of Roscanvel, and there is Lanrivain, and close by there, I think, is the farm where ' M. Alexis ' was killed the other day, as we heard. There is a path leading to it through a copse, and it was doubtless by that that the Blues came when they surprised him. . . . Yes, I know it well, though I cannot read the map. My sister lives at Carhoët, and I have a nephew at Roscanvel."

" Good," said La Vireville, studying the chart of blossoms. " Well, mon gars, I want to go to Carhoët directly I return from Jersey. You could meet me at the fishing village, Porhoët, I suppose, and conduct me to Carhoët and some other places that I want to visit there ? Can one land with any measure of safety at Porhoët ? "

Grain d'Orge nodded his great head. " Surely, Monsieur Augustin. ' M. Alexis ' had an agent of some

kind living at Porhoët, for the Jersey correspondence, so that once I get into touch with him it should not be difficult. One should take precautions, though, in spite of the truce; is it not so, Monsieur Augustin?"

"The headache which I have at this moment, mon vieux, supplies a sufficient answer to that question."

"You will not go to the peace conferences at La Prévalaye, then, Monsieur Augustin?" asked his younger lieutenant.

La Vireville shrugged his shoulders. "Do you think, my dear Le Goffic, that I am a particularly good exemplar of peace—a man who has been fired on during this truce which Grain d'Orge so rightly distrusts? No, I do not believe in the possibility of a lasting peace at present, and I am sure that even if it is concluded it will be broken in a month or two. Neither side really wants it; they are merely deluded if they think they do. M. du Boishardy—he writes to me from La Prévalaye itself—is young and enthusiastic, and believes too readily in the good in other people. But he recognises that he is not likely to see me there—otherwise he would hardly have suggested my going over to Carhoët."

"Monsieur Augustin is right," said Grain d'Orge sagely, shaking his grizzled locks. "Nobody wants a peace, and it will not last."

"Well, you shall guide me to Carhoët from Porhoët in a day or two. I must make a try for Jersey to-night if the wind serves. Burn the flare at ten o'clock, for I think we shall find that the Jersey lugger will be off the point. I know that the Prince is impatient to see me, and it is possible that he may have forgotten I was coming from Southampton, not from here."

"I will see to the matter," said Le Goffic.

"There is something else of importance that I want to discuss with you two," went on La Vireville, lowering his voice; and his two dissimilar lieutenants, seated on the beech-mast like himself, brought themselves nearer. "If—note that I only say *if*—there were to be

an émigré landing, supported by the British Government, this summer, somewhere in the Morbihan, do you think that our gars could be relied on to follow me to Southern Brittany to co-operate with it ? "

(2)

Anne-Hilarion had picked primroses, as suggested, for Grain d'Orge, but he had not given them to him, for, sensible little boy that he was, he knew the signs of a grown-up being really too absorbed to attend to him, since Grandpapa himself sometimes exhibited them. The most unmistakable of these were written now upon the three men who sat, talking so earnestly, under the beech-tree. He had approached them tentatively once or twice, but even M. le Chevalier took no notice of him—did not, in fact, appear to be aware that he was there—so in the end he presented his second harvest to the other Chouan, who received it with testimonies of extreme gratitude, and arranged some of the flowers round his greasy wide-brimmed hat. This man could not speak a word of French, so all he and Anne could do was to sit side by side on the log and smile spasmodically at each other. Anne regretted that his foreign shell with the stripes was in M. le Chevalier's pocket, for a scheme had just visited him of filling it with water and putting primroses into it. He gave a sudden little yawn. What a long, long time M. le Chevalier was talking. . . .

His head was all but nodding when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and there was M. le Chevalier bending over him.

" Are you bored to death, my child, or asleep ? " he asked kindly. " I have been a terrible while talking, have I not ? It is Grain d'Orge's fault ; he is so obstinate. Now, would you like to come for a little walk in the wood before we have our next meal ? There is just time, and I have something to show you."

Anne-Hilarion jumped up from the log with much alacrity.

"What is it that we are going to see, M. le Chevalier?" he asked, as he set off, his hand in his friend's. "Do ogres live in this forest—or giants? Or perhaps there is buried treasure? You know, I have never seen so many trees all together at one time as this. I could not count them, *possibly*!"

"No, I should think not," agreed La Vireville. "You cannot even see them all. This is the way, where the little path strikes off. I am going to show you, Anne, the château of Kerdronan, where I lived when I was a boy like you."

"Oh, M. le Chevalier, I shall like that!"

"Wait till you see it!" said Fortuné.

And they went along the path, little more than a track, that wound between the trees. Over and about them were the fledgling beech-leaves, of the loveliest green of hope and innocence, so young and untried that they resembled gleams of bright water rather than anything more palpable; and underfoot, crackling like paper, were their fellows of last year.

"Then you used to come and play in this wood when you were a boy, M. le Chevalier?" began Anne-Hilarion again.

"I knew every inch of it once," replied the émigré.

Anne-Hilarion gave a sigh of envy. "But you ran away to sea, did you not?" he asked, and there was a strong suggestion of reproach in his tone.

La Vireville smiled. "Never!" he said. "What put such an idea into your head? I was in the navy once, it is true—I served under Suffren—but I assure you that I got there by the most legitimate channels Mind that root, child!"

"Papa said that you had been a sailor," explained Anne, "and I thought——"

"I see," said his friend, amused.

"Are there as many trees as this in Jersey?" was Anne-Hilarion's next question.

"No, nephew, there are not. By the way, I don't believe I have ever told you where I am going to take you when we get to St. Helier—to Jersey, that is?"

"Perhaps to the house of a pirate?" suggested Anne-Hilarion hopefully.

This time La Vireville laughed outright. "My child, what an imagination you have! No; to the house of my mother. She lives there."

"Why?" inquired his charge.

La Vireville did not answer for a moment. "For various reasons," he replied, at length. "One of them you will see in a few minutes."

"I should think," observed Anne, looking about him as they went on, "that it was in a big wood like this, where nobody could see them, that the two brothers of Liddesdale met and fought."

"Who were they?" asked the Frenchman. "I never heard of them."

"They are in a story of Elspeth's that she told me once. They fought about a lady, and the lady was false to both of them. Is that why people generally fight duels, M. le Chevalier?"

La Vireville switched at an anemone with a hazel twig that he had pulled off.

"Good God!" he exclaimed to himself. "It is not the only reason, child," he returned. "But duels are not subjects for little boys to talk about."

Ordinarily Anne-Hilarion would have been deterred at once by a tone and a phraseology so foreign to the speaker, as he knew him, but he was undeniably wrought upon by his surroundings, and pursued the forbidden topic.

"I expect you have fought a duel, have you not, M. le Chevalier?" he said tentatively, looking up at his tall companion. But La Vireville was silent.

"Perhaps several?" suggested the inquirer; and though he still got no answer, went on, "Were any of them here, in this wood?"

"No," said the Chouan, walking very fast. "—Now leave the subject alone, there's a good child! You will see in a moment what we have come to see. Here the wood ends, but it goes on again afterwards."

They had come, in fact, to the edge of the forest—or, rather, to an extensive clearing crossed by a deep-rutted woodland road. The émigré led the way along this for twenty yards or so, and then stopped.

There in front of them, at the end of a grass-grown avenue of larches, now swaying in all their first delicate green joy, stood the corpse of a large seventeenth century manor-house. Not decay, but violence, had slain it; it was gutted from end to end, so that with its blackened, jagged walls, its grinning rafters, and the few tall chimneys that yet stood, it looked, between those arcades of feathery mirth, like a skeleton in fairyland.

"Oh, poor house!" exclaimed Anne-Hilarion compassionately. "What has happened to it? Whose is it?"

"Mine!" replied La Vireville. His mouth was rather grim.

"Is that Ker—where you lived?"

La Vireville nodded. "The Blues burnt it down two years ago. It does not look very pretty now, does it? Yet it was beautiful once."

"Oh, M. le Chevalier, you must have been very sorry!"

"Sorry? Of course I was sorry, Anne. I was born there, and my father and grandfather before me. . . . Well, there are no more of us, so perhaps it does not much matter. We must go back now."

The little boy stood with a very grave face under the larches, and looked at the irremediable havoc towards which they led. Then he thrust his hand silently into his friend's, and they both turned back into the wood.

(3)

"So, after all, Anne, your good-bye to France is a very peaceful one," observed La Vireville some hours later.

He spoke the truth. The deck of the *Aristocrate*, one of the armed luggers employed in the Jersey correspondence, was under their feet, and the *Aristocrate* herself, her sail ready to go up to the favouring wind, lay gently rolling on a tranquil sea. The little boat, manned by La Vireville's own gars, which had brought them out without adventure to the lugger, was just pulling away. La Vireville, standing by the side, looked after her.

"Yes, this is really your farewell to France. God knows when you will see it again."

"I think, perhaps," replied the Comte de Flavigny in his uncompromising treble, "that I would rather live in England. Though I like the Chouans. . . . But you will, no doubt, be going back to France, M. le Chevalier?"

"I? Yes, in a couple of days, most probably," answered the émigré rather absently, gazing at the moon-silvered coast, dear and implacable, where one day, as he well knew, he should land for the last time.

"And what the devil is this, M. de la Vireville?" demanded a voice behind him, and La Vireville turned to see Lieutenant Gosset, the Jerseyman who commanded the *Aristocrate*. "Have you kidnapped it, or is it, perchance, your own?" went on the sailor

"Neither," answered La Vireville. "Let me make known to you the Comte Anne-Hilarion de Flavigny. We have been making a little tour of Northern France together." And Anne made a bow, while Gosset laughed, half puzzled, and the lugger's mainsail went up.

"May I stay on deck with you a little quarter of an hour?" begged Anne, snuggling down by La Vireville's side in the moonlight. "And tell me,

please, M. le Chevalier, about Madame your mother, to whom we are going. Is she—is she old ? "

" That depends on what you consider old, my pigeon. She does not seem so to me. But perhaps I am old myself ; I expect you think so, don't you ? Her hair is grey, it is true—but so would mine be, Anne, if I had to look after you much longer."

Anne smiled, recognising this for a jest, not to be taken seriously. He studied his friend, whose bandaged head was bare in the windy moonlight.

" I like your hair," he observed thoughtfully. " But already—is it rude of me to say so ?—there are some grey hairs there . . . only a few." He laid a small finger on La Vireville's temple. " I saw them when you were asleep in the cave."

" I have so many cares," sighed the Chouan. " You have seen, Anne, what a quantity of people I have to look after in Brittany. Then there is my mother —and, lately, a certain small boy. . . . And, by the way, it is time that small boy went to bed. We shall not reach St. Helier till morning."

He went off to see what accommodation had been prepared for the child. When he returned, he found Anne giving an account of his adventures to the interested Gosset, who was standing looking down at him with his hands on his hips.

" And now," finished Anne, " M. le Chevalier is going to take me to Mme. de la Vireville in Jersey, and then I shall go home to my Grandpapa in London."

" You seem to have had a stirring time, by gad ! " commented the sailor. " But I did not know that you had a wife, La Vireville ! Since when are you married, may I ask, and who is the fortunate lady ? "

The Frenchman frowned. " You are misinformed," he said shortly. " I have never had a wife. It is my mother to whom I am taking him."

" I beg your pardon ! " exclaimed Gosset, struck by the sudden change in his face, and La Vireville turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XIV

CÆSAREA THE GREEN

(1)

THE port of St. Helier, reached at last after such vicissitudes of seafaring, was ringing with Jersey-French and English, and here and there with the genuine tongue of Gaul, for the place was full of Royalist refugees. As the tall Frenchman with the bandaged head, holding by the hand the little boy in the dishevelled English clothes, made his way between fishermen, loiterers, and an occasional man-of-war's man from the English frigate in the roads, he nodded to an acquaintance or two, not staying, however, to satisfy the curiosity of any.

It happened that their road from the harbour led through some stalls of market produce. Anne was chattering gaily as they passed between heaps of apples and onions, when the course of his legs was suddenly checked, and, through surprise, that of his tongue also, by the fact that his conductor had stopped. He looked up, and followed the direction of his friend's eyes to where, by a stall a little farther on, two women had paused. The one was an upstanding Jersey peasant girl with a basket on her arm, the other a little elderly lady in black. At the moment one of her diminutive hands was resting on a robust cabbage, where it looked like a belated butterfly.

"No, this is larger than I require," she was saying, in the prettiest broken English.

La Vireville, followed by Anne, went up behind her and stooped over her.

"Reconsider your decision, petite maman, I pray you," he said softly. "A man is hungry after the sea, and there are two of us——"

The reticule in the lady's other hand went to earth as she turned and grasped his arm. "Fortuné! Mon fils! Dieu soit loué! But I expected you days ago! I have been in torment that you came not. Where have you been—and ah, my God, what have you done to your head?"

The little white hands went fluttering over him as if they must assure themselves that he was really there. He was so much taller than she that to meet her upturned face with its delicate cheeks and young eyes he had to stoop a long way. The kiss was given and returned among the stalls with that candour of the Latin races, the testimony of whose emotions is not confined to withindoors, and it is probable that for Mme. de la Vireville at that moment, if not for her son, the market-place did not exist. And being half French itself, it looked on with sympathy.

But the man at least remembered the existence of someone else, and while those fingers were still stroking his arm and the soft voice was yet asking him questions, he caught hold of his mother's hand.

"You want to know where I have been, ma mère? I have been in France with a travelling companion, whose acquaintance you must now make. Here he is."

Mme. de la Vireville, still under the sway of emotion, turned, looking for something of the size of her son. So at first she saw no one. Then she gave an exclamation.

"Anne, let me present you to my mother. Ma mère, this is the Comte Anne-Hilarion de Flavigny. We will tell you our adventures presently; but just now I fancy that M. le Comte is hungry."

"The little angel!" murmured Mme. de la Vire-

ville, and this time it was she who had to stoop. "He shall come home with us at once, le cher petit."

And Anne finished his journey, therefore, holding a hand of each.

(2)

Mme. de la Vireville lived in the plainest way in a small house in St. Helier. Indeed no other manner of life was open to her, for she and her son were very poor, though they had not always been so. But resource was innate to her French blood. Besides, Jersey was dear to her—dearer at least than England would have been—for it was near France, and those expeditions in which Fortuné so frequently hazarded his life had Jersey for their starting-point. So, at irregular intervals, she was able to see him; sometimes he even slept a night or two beneath her roof. Every time they parted she knew that the odds were considerably on the side of their never meeting again. But she had in her little body the soul of a hero, and in consequence her son kept back few secrets from her; indeed, he often came to her for advice, as he would have done to a comrade. In spite of great sorrows she had about her something eternally young, something in the mind corresponding to the almost infantine freshness of her oval face under its crown of grey hair.

The simple meal was gay. The small visitor, bathed, brushed, even mended as to his more noticeable rents, had one side of the table to himself, and plied a very creditable knife and fork. How much he loved and admired Fortuné, and how fond Fortuné was of him, soon became apparent to Mme. de la Vireville; and when she slipped out into the kitchen to put the last touches to the salad, Jeanne Carré, the Jersey girl, observed respectfully:

" One might almost say, Madame, that it was M. le Chevalier's son sitting there at table with you ! "

A vivid look of pain shot across Mme. de la Vireville's face, and was gone in an instant. " Yes, might one not, my child ? " she answered quietly. But later, when she was back in the little parlour with her guests, and sat for a moment studying the two, her gaze was clouded with a profound sadness. And, as it happened, her son looked up and caught the expression. His eyes smiled at her, but his mouth was grave.

At the end of the repast Anne-Hilarion was installed in an arm-chair with a book, while mother and son conferred together on the window-seat.

" You will oblige me, Fortuné," began Mme. de la Vireville, " by going as soon as possible to a surgeon. You are telling me the truth when you say that it is nothing serious ? " she added, eyeing the bandage round his head with suspicion.

" Have you ever known me lie to you, little mother ? " he retorted. " The bullet must have struck the mast and glanced off on to my head, which is equally hard. I promise you that I will have the scratch attended to. But first I must make inquiries about the English frigate. Should she be sailing this afternoon or evening, as I suspect, Anne must go in her."

" You will not go with him yourself, Fortuné ? "

" No, I must find an officer to whom to confide him. It should not be difficult. And after that I must see the Prince without delay ; I am already four or five days late, and as usual there is some business about landing muskets."

The light that had sprung into his mother's eyes died out of them. " Surely, if you are not going to England, you could stay here this one night ? "

La Vireville bent forward and kissed her. " We will see, my heart. Meanwhile, I leave M. le Comte in your charge."

(3)

A couple of hours later he returned with a young man in uniform, and Mr. Francis Tollemache, of His Britannic Majesty's Navy, had his first glimpse of a French interior.

"My mother speaks a little English," said La Vireville encouragingly in that tongue, "and Anne is fluent except when he talks Scotch. The *Pomone* is sailing for Weymouth this afternoon," he explained to Mme. de la Vireville. "Her captain will give Anne a passage, and Mr. Tollemache, who has a few days' leave on arrival, will be kind enough to take him to London with him."

And while his mother started to captivate the young lieutenant, La Vireville took his travelling companion on his knee and told him what had been arranged. Anne-Hilarion quietly hid his face in the émigré's breast, and the latter half thought that he was crying —a rare occurrence.

"You will not mind, will you, Anne, that I do not come with you?" he asked coaxingly. "They will be very kind to you on board the man-of-war, and you will like to see a frigate. In a few days you will be back with Grandpapa; I don't suppose Papa will have got home yet. Think how anxious they must be about you in Cavendish Square!"

But Anne would say nothing save, in a little voice, "I wish you were coming, M. le Chevalier; I wish you were coming!"

And La Vireville, holding him tight, was surprised to find how much he wished he were.

"You promised to be my uncle in England also," said the little boy presently in rather a melancholy voice.

"Well, so I will, my child, when next I come over. But I have my folk in Brittany to look after now. You remember Grain d'Orge and the rest, don't you?"

Meanwhile Mr. Tollemache, at the other side of the

room, had brought about the very catastrophe he wished to avoid, having from sheer apprehension talked in his own tongue (he knew no other) so fast and so loud to Mme. de la Vireville that he had caused the complete shipwreck of what had never been a very sea-worthy vessel—her English. She had therefore relapsed into French and he into silence. Perceiving this, La Vireville put down Anne and went over to them.

"Suppose, ma mère," he suggested, "that we leave the fellow-travellers to make each other's acquaintance without us?" And the next moment the Comte de Flavigny and Mr. Tollemache were left alone.

Anne-Hilarion looked a trifle shy, but eyed his new acquaintance with interest; Mr. Tollemache, on the other hand, appeared to be suffering a certain degree of anguish, and to have no idea what to say. It was Anne, therefore, who broke the ice by remarking: "You are going to take me in your ship, Monsieur?"

"Yes," said the sailor. "Old—I mean the captain has given permission."

"You are not the captain then?"

"God bless me, no!"

"That was the ship—that large one we saw at entering?"

The young man nodded. "The *Pomone*, forty-four guns. I'll show you all over her when we get on board." And, seeing the direction of the little boy's eyes, he half shamefacedly hitched forward his sword. "Would you like to look at this?"

Anne came nearer, and in order better to approximate their heights Mr. Tollemache decided to sit down. Anne then stood by his knee and examined the sword-hilt with gravity. After which he said, in his most earnest manner, "I should very much like to see your ship, Monsieur. You see, I have been in a great many lately, and they were all different Yes, if you would please draw your sword. You have perhaps killed pirates with it?" . . .

When La Vireville came back in a quarter of an

hour or so he felt—was it possible?—a tiny prick of jealousy at seeing Anne on the young lieutenant's knee. It was true that the child slipped off at once and came to him, but his conversation for the moment was entirely pervaded by the scraps of information he had just acquired about the British Navy.

"By Jove, it's time to go!" exclaimed Mr. Tollemache, catching sight of the clock. "Are the boy's things ready?"

"He has only got what he stands up in," said La Vireville, smiling. "No, here's my mother with a bundle she has put together, but Heaven knows what is in it."

"Well, there will be no lack of boat-cloaks to keep him warm," returned the sailor. "I promise you I will look after him; he seems a jolly little beggar." And he added feelingly: "It's a mercy he can talk English!"

So, farewells to Mme. de la Vireville over, they walked down to the quay, the new protector and the old, with Anne between them. A boat's crew from the frigate was already waiting at the slip. La Vireville went down on one knee and put an arm about his little comrade.

"Will you kiss me, Anne?"

For answer, Anne clung to him so tightly that a curl became entangled on a button and took a deal of disengaging. . . .

Then once again Anne was in a boat—but not with him. La Vireville turned on his heel with Mr. Tollemache's "Give way, men!" in his ears, then changed his mind, and stood watching the progress of the gig as the oars urged it forward over the dancing water. The small figure in the stern looked back at him all the time.

(4)

Philip d'Auvergne, titular Prince de Bouillon and captain in the British Navy, received the Chevalier

de la Vireville rather petulantly in the little house which he inhabited under the shadow of the half-ruined castle of Montorgueil, over at Gorey. He was a good-looking, florid man of one-and-forty, somewhat overfond of surrounding with circumstance the title which had so strangely descended upon him, and converted an unknown naval officer of Jersey into a French prince of the house of Turenne—deprived, it is true, of his principality by the Revolution—while leaving him all the while a British subject. At heart he was generous and loyal.

"What the devil is this I hear about a wild-goose chase to France after a little boy, M. de la Vireville?" he began angrily. "Is this the meaning of your being so long overdue? I wanted you yesterday to land a party of émigrés near Cancale, and I had to employ Chateaubriand instead."

"Permit me to observe to your Highness," returned the culprit coolly, "that I am not, at this moment, disposed to lend my services to that side of the correspondence. My men in my own command have a prior claim on my attention just now."

"I am glad you realise that, Monsieur," retorted the Prince rather tartly. "Yet the muskets and ammunition have been waiting for them nearly a week."

La Vireville gave his shoulders a slight shrug. "The delay was unavoidable, mon Prince," he said, wondering whether it were the hot room which was making his head ache so. "I am ready to superintend the landing of that cargo whenever you please."

The Prince seem mollified. "Good," he remarked. "Sit down, M. de la Vireville, and before we go into details over that affair I will tell you an important piece of news. . . . You have nothing serious the matter with your head, I trust?"

"Nothing," the émigré assured him, as, half expecting that he was going to be told about the Carhoët command, he took a seat opposite Captain d'Auvergne at the big table, strewn with maps and papers.

"His Majesty's Government," went on the Prince, bringing out the words as if their utterance gave him pleasure, "have decided to support a Royalist expedition this summer to the coast of France, to land perhaps in Southern Brittany, perhaps in Vendée. You could co-operate with your Chouans, I suppose?"

"A little while ago, mon Prince," replied La Vireville, "I should have said No. But, having already heard of the likelihood of such a step, I took the opportunity of sounding my men on the point yesterday—by which your Highness sees that my delay has not been without fruit. And I am now convinced that I could, with some difficulty, get them to follow me to Finistère or Morbihan, but south of the Loire, no. They would never leave Brittany."

Leaning back in his carved chair, with the crown on the top, the Prince de Bouillon digested this information. La Vireville thought that his face had a little fallen on learning that the proposed expedition was no secret to his visitor. Although he liked him in spite of them, the Chouan was well aware of Captain d'Auvergne's weaknesses, and he let his gaze stray up to the framed pedigree on the wall behind the Prince's head that showed where, in the mists of the thirteenth century, that branch had burgeoned on the ancient stem of La Tour d'Auvergne which was to blossom, during the eighteenth, in the present scion. From that it wandered out of the window, whence he could see the blue expanse of Gorey Bay. He wondered whether the *Pomone* had weighed yet. . . . Confound this beating in his head!

His Serene Highness suddenly bent forward and laid a hand on his arm. "La Vireville, I am afraid you are unwell! It *is* your head, then; what have you done to it?"

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed the émigré, removing the hand with which he had unconsciously covered his eyes. "The fact is that I have a damnable headache—

a relic of the wild-goose chase, nothing more. It will be gone to-morrow, Monseigneur."

"Then to-morrow, my dear fellow, will serve us to discuss matters. I was sure," said the good-natured Prince, "that there was something under that bandage, and that you have not had it attended to since you landed. No, I thought not. Will you take a glass of wine? . . . Well, go home to Madame de la Vireville, make her my compliments, and tell her that I am sending my surgeon to see you at once."

But as La Vireville left Gorey he wondered whether it were not rather a touch of heartache than of headache that he had.

(5)

The smile which Mme. de la Vireville gave the Prince's surgeon when, after examination of her son's hurt, he ordered him at least three days' complete rest, must have gone to his head, for, being a young man and a jocular, he remarked to his patient as he left, "You have a trifle on the breast of your coat, Monsieur—an involuntary token at parting, I take it—which you may like to know of. . . . I hope I have not been indiscreet!"

La Vireville, who, in obedience to orders, was then lying at full length on the little sofa, stared at the speaker rather haughtily and made no answer. But when the door had shut he said, "Look at my coat for me, little mother, and let us see what that farceur meant."

Mme. de la Vireville, who had the sight of a girl, bent over him, and after a second pointed to where, round a button, were tangled two long bright brown hairs.

Her son frowned, then he smiled. "Take them off, my little heart, and keep them for me. I may as well have some souvenir of my 'nephew,' since it is likely to be long enough before I see him again."

Later he was still lying there, and she sat on a stool beside him, her head resting against his pillow, her hand in his. Suddenly he said, though he had been silent a long time:

"I think if . . . I think *hers* would have been like Anne."

She understood him perfectly, because she, and she alone, knew the bitter grave where his heart was buried.

"Yes . . . but he would have been less fair." She put her hand on his dark hair, and, drawing his bandaged head to her shoulder, kissed it passionately.

CHAPTER XV

CAVENDISH SQUARE ONCE MORE

(I)

FOR the second time that day Baptiste was distractedly polishing his silver. About every six minutes a tear rolled off his sharp nose on to salver or tankard and had to be wiped off, and the dull patch rubbed up again. Lal Khan, putting Mr. Elphinstone's bedroom to rights with long, dusky fingers, stared mournfully at a miniature propped on the dressing-table, and shook his head. And still further upstairs Mrs. Elspeth Saunders was mending stockings; her nose was red, so too her eyes. In the kitchen the cook and the rest of the domestics were discussing the situation, as they had almost unceasingly discussed it for the last few days since Elspeth's return. Her own account of what had happened they had long ago threshed bare: had thrilled to hear how, when she reached Rose Cottage at seven o'clock that fateful morning, as arranged, she had been met by one of the old ladies with the horrifying news that their guest had evidently spirited Anne-Hilarion away in the night; how, almost beside herself at this intelligence, she had suffered them to hustle her into a postchaise on a totally false scent, which caused her to traverse many miles of the county of Kent until, half-crazed and wholly destitute of money, she returned at last in sheer desperation to London, there to hear that La Vireville had already started to France in pursuit of the child. The opinion of the region was divided,

some of its inmates inclining to blame Mrs. Saunders, some to commiserate. And it was either the consciousness of unjust condemnation or of her own innate superiority which kept Elspeth so much alone in the big house over which hung that piercing sense of something gone that would never, perhaps, come back again. . . .

"'Twas but a few days syne A was tellin' a piece to the bairn in his bed!" Elspeth rapped her thimble suddenly against her teeth, flung down her mending, and marched downstairs. At the library door she knocked, and, receiving no answer, looked in. The room was empty and the fire burnt low. Muttering to herself anent the negligence of "yon black heathen," she made it up. There was a book open on the table, but no signs that Mr. Elphinstone had been occupied, as of custom, with his memoirs. Elspeth left the library and went to the pantry.

"Where is the maister, d'ye ken?" she asked of the polisher.

"I tink he go again to the ministère, I do not know," responded Baptiste, sighing.

"Tae the meenister!" retorted Elspeth. "What wad be the sense in that noo? Gif prayin' could bring the wean back, A reckon he'd been here these mony days!" (Had not she herself, descendant of the Covenanters, taken the incredible step of removing Our Lady of Pontmain from the back of the drawer where, immediately upon the Marquis's departure, she had been stowed away, and putting her in the very centre of the mantelpiece in the lost child's room—a deed for which she nightly besought forgiveness?)

"That is ver' true," agreed the Frenchman, "but it is not that which I mean, Madame Saundair. I mean he go to the—how do you call it?—there where are the State Secretaries."

"Why for canna ye say what ye mean, then?" snapped the lady. "That mebbe will dae gude. At

least they arena French there. A've had eno' o' yer Frenchies tae last ma life ! "

Baptiste withered.

" Those . . . those weemen at Canterbury ! " proceeded Elspeth. " And then—what d'ye call him, the Chevaleer . . . what gar'd Glenauchtie send *him* after the bairn instead o' an Englishman ? Him that jockeyed the wean oot o' his bed at nicht ! Belike 'tis he's spirited him awa the noo ! "

Baptiste made no effort to defend his compatriot. He had long ago realised that to live in peace with Mrs. Saunders required a policy of thoroughgoing self-effacement, and had decided that on the whole it was worth it. Otherwise he might have retorted that she, pure of any Gallic strain though she was, had not proved singularly successful in her guardianship. Instead, he feebly used his wash-leather on a ladle.

" There's ane gude thing," resumed Elspeth, " that the Marquis doesna ken yet awhile."

" But when he return ! " exclaimed the old man, lifting eyes and hands to heaven.

He was still in this attitude when there came a rousing rat-tat at the hall-door.

" Mebbe that's the Marquis the noo ! " ejaculated Mrs. Saunders. And, though it was not her place to do so, she flung off her apron and rushed to answer it.

(2)

Lieutenant Francis Tollemache, therefore, standing on the steps, received one of the most painful shocks of his life when a gaunt Scottish female, darting forth, caught his small companion from the ground and almost stifled him with kisses, and then showed a decided disposition to cast herself on his breast also. He prepared to defend himself, backing hurriedly to the limits of the portico, and saying disjointedly,

"My good woman, my good woman . . ." And then in a moment there was some old man actually trying to kiss his hand, and from the back of the hall there was even advancing a salaaming native in a turban, while more and more female servants came flocking towards the doorstep. It was intolerable! In a minute or two there would be a crowd outside, and already Mr. Tollemache was conscious of the enraptured gaze of the hackney coachman who had brought them there.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, very red. "For Heaven's sake let's get inside!" But even within the hall the whirl of greetings and emotion continued, and Anne-Hilarion kept disappearing from view in successive avalanches of embraces, till at last his voice was upraised, asking, "Grandpapa! Where is Grandpapa? Has Papa come back?"

"Yes, where is the master of the house?" demanded Mr. Tollemache, with some indignation, and was most unseasonably answered in French by the old man. Meanwhile, one of the younger domestics in the background was threatened with a fit of hysterics, and had to be removed. During this episode Anne skipped about the hall, and ran into the library and the dining-room in turn. "Oh, I wish Grandpapa were in! When will he be back?" he queried, and mixed with his inquiries the unfortunate young officer heard the remark, "There, you see, it's no foreigner as has brought him back,"—to which the cook, who had an affinity on the lower deck of H.M.S. *Thunderer*, responded with pride, "No, it's a Navy gentleman!"

"Anne," said Mr. Tollemache firmly, holding out his hand, "I must be going. Good-bye!"

The Comte de Flavigny came at once and caught him by the cuff of his uniform. "No, no, M. le lieutenant! No, I do not want you to go! Come into the bibliothèque and wait for Grandpapa!" he said, with a little tug, and the domestic crowd, waking all at once to a sense of their forgotten duties, concurred

in this request, which, to tell the truth, accorded very well with Mr. Tollemache's most secret wish. It was not that he at all desired to receive the thanks of Mr. Elphinstone, but—though he would have died on the scaffold rather than admit it—he hankered for just a few minutes more of Anne's society before the final good-bye.

"If you would come into Mr. Elphinstone's study, sir?" suggested Elspeth respectfully, as he hesitated. Since she now evinced no desire to embrace him, he was about to accede to her request when there was a knock at the front door, which opened to admit the grinning and curious face of the hackney coachman, demanding to know if he was to wait any longer.

So it was not Anne only who was overjoyed when Mr. Elphinstone walked suddenly in.

Late that evening—much later than he ought to have been up—Anne-Hilarion still sat contentedly though sleepily enfolded in his grandfather's arms. He had ceased to ask questions, for they had all been satisfactorily answered . . . all except that "Did you miss me, Grandpapa?" to which Grandpapa had seemed incapable of replying. So his last remark was a statement.

"I had to leave my goldfish behind with those ladies." For he had satisfied himself that Elspeth had not brought it back with her after all.

"Don't speak of those women!" said the gentle old man fiercely. "As for your goldfish, child, you shall have a whole aquarium if you wish."

"Then I could put my big shell inside," murmured Anne drowsily. "M. le Chevalier said it came from . . . came from. . . ." He ceased suddenly; he was asleep.

Conscience-stricken at last, Mr. Elphinstone rang the bell for Elspeth, and was left by the fire to reflect on the inexhaustible mercy of Heaven, and

on the debt that he owed to a man away in Jersey, whom he scarcely knew, whom he could not even thank—a debt that in any case, so far as he could see, must ever go unpaid, for it was unpayable.

CHAPTER XVI

THE AGENT DE LA CORRESPONDANCE

(I)

IT was not until the *Seaflower's* boat was actually pulling off from the shore, and his feet were sunk in the wet sand of Porhoët Bay, that Fortuné de la Vireville realised how much more serious than he had imagined might prove the results of the ridiculous accident which had befallen him a few hours previously at St. Helier. Embarking, according to arrangement with the Prince de Bouillon, on the lugger *Seaflower* with a view to being landed, not at Kerdronan as usual, but at Porhoët, where Grain d'Orge was to meet him, he had had the misfortune to receive upon his left foot the full weight of a refractory water-cask of considerable size, which, escaping from the hands of a clumsy sailor, had rolled vehemently down a gang-plank upon him before he could get out of its way. It is true that when he had finished swearing he had found the episode rather ludicrous, and had laughed at himself for his ill-luck, and that on board the lugger, slipping along with an easy evening breeze from Jersey, the damaged foot, though it had sufficiently pained, had not greatly incommoded him. But here, at midnight, alone on the hostile coast of France, he knew for the first time that he was indeed disabled, and that he could not fully rely on that vigorous body of his which for thirty odd years had seldom failed to respond to the often exorbitant demands that he made upon it. It was not at all a pleasant thought, and, standing there at the water's

edge, La Vireville uttered a final and more fervent malediction upon the water-cask.

The boat which had landed him, with its muffled oars, was already out of hearing, though it was still visible, a lessening dark lump upon the quiet sea. Even the lugger, farther out, could almost be discerned by one who knew where to look for her, though the moon which, a week ago, had lighted the way to Jersey for Anne-Hilarion, was obscured this evening. La Vireville glanced about the beach. As far as could be ascertained in the dusk, it was quite deserted; there was no sound but the lap of the incoming tide, and no sign whatever of Grain d'Orge, who should of course have been there to meet him. And, since the émigré had no acquaintance with these few miles of coast, without a guide he was helpless; an attempt to penetrate inland would probably end in his running into an enemy patrol—in spite of the truce, the last thing he wished to do—and even in Porhoët village he had no idea which house he was to make for. Moreover, he was lame—a great deal more lame than he had had any idea of, or he would hardly have landed. . . . And, cursing Grain d'Orge, he began to limp away from the water's edge. In any case, it would be more prudent to approach the low cliffs, where it was darker, than to stand where he was; and under the cliffs, if nothing better offered, he must wait for his dilatory guide.

M. de la Vireville went painfully over the tract of large, rolling pebbles between him and the cliffs, the sweat breaking out on his forehead; but, not having 'chouanné' for nothing, he set his teeth and persevered, throwing his weight as much as possible on his sound foot and on the stick with which the captain of the *Seaflower* had furnished him. "Devilish odd I must look from the cliff," he reflected, "if there's a patrol up there." But, apparently, there was no patrol, and having pursued his way unmolested up the purgatorial bank he sat down, with a sigh of relief, his

back against the cliff, and waited, either for discovery or guidance.

"There is at least one thing to be thankful for," he reflected, "and that is, that I have not the child with me now." But all the same it seemed strange not to have him, and to know no anxiety but for his own personal safety—a burden he was so accustomed to carrying that he scarcely felt its weight.

La Vireville had been there, propped against the cliff, for perhaps half an hour, before he heard the owl's cry. He answered it faintly and cautiously, perceiving, to his astonishment, that it came from seaward, and in a little beheld the dim figure of a man detach itself from an overturned boat on the shingle. As it came towards him it looked, by some trick of the faint light, as unreal as the little bay itself, though it wore the usual peasant's costume, appropriate enough to the scene, and had over its shoulder a large net. When this individual was within distance, La Vireville told him softly what he thought of him, for the apparition was Grain d'Orge.

"I was under the boat watching the cliff," said the Chouan, undisturbed by his leader's abuse. "If I had taken Monsieur Augustin up the cliffs when he landed we might both have been shot—in spite of the truce. They shot three men yesterday. But now we can go on to the village."

"I wanted to get farther than that to-night," said La Vireville, "though the devil knows how I am to manage it now. Is it impossible to push on to Carhoët at present?"

"There are hussars quartered at Carhoët to-night," answered his guide. "They leave to-morrow, probably."

La Vireville began to struggle to his feet. "I see. That is sufficient reason against attempting it. There is another reason, too, why I should not get so far. You may have to carry me as it is, mon vieux. I am

as lame as a duck. If we should chance to meet a patrol, you must run for it, and leave me to take my chance. Do you hear ? "

The Breton turned a stolid face on him. " Yes, I hear. But I am not good at running. Is Monsieur Augustin ready ? "

" As ready as he is ever like to be. Where are you taking me ? "

" To a fisherman's cottage just outside Porhoët. There is no one there but a woman — Madame Rozel."

" The fisherman's wife ? "

" His widow, some say," responded Grain d'Orge. And he then added the somewhat surprising information : " It is she who has acted as the agent of the late Monsieur Alexis here."

" Really ! " said La Vireville—not that he was particularly surprised at the choice of a woman for such a post. He put his hand on his follower's shoulder, and, with Grain d'Orge's arm round him, moved off towards the cliff path.

(2)

Not a gleam of light came from the solitarily-standing little cottage when at last they reached it, but after Grain d'Orge had knocked softly its door opened as though by magic. A whisper, and the Chouan turned to his disabled leader and helped him into the blackness within, past a figure of which only the glimmering coif could be guessed. The door was shut, and then, standing rather dazed in the dark, La Vireville heard the scrape of flint and steel. In another moment the occupant of the cottage had lit the lamp that stood ready on the table, and had turned towards the two men.

The light, seeming by its suddenness more potent than it really was, showed to the émigré a woman of

about thirty, of a face and figure extraordinarily unlike what he expected, just then, to see.

"Welcome, Monsieur," she said in a low voice, and the purity of the accent, coming from under the wide peasant's cap, made La Vireville jump. He stammered out something, staring at her, and then he found that she was asking him if he would not eat.

He sat down, puzzled, to the bread and meat and wine ready on the table, and the Breton, after a moment's hesitation, did the same. As a matter of fact, La Vireville was passably hungry, and not a little exhausted by his painful walk. But he could scarcely eat for watching the slim hands that cut the bread and poured his wine. They were brown enough, but the shape and the well-tended nails betrayed them. At last he began to feel annoyed with Grain d'Orge for keeping him in the dark as to the identity of his hostess, since to believe for a moment that she was a fisherman's wife was impossible. If not a lady of great quality she was no woman of the people. And, seizing an opportunity when she was gone from the room, he addressed his guide.

"What the devil do you mean by foisting me upon a gentlewoman in this fashion? Who is she?"

Grain d'Orge went on stolidly eating.

"As I told Monsieur Augustin, she is the agent for the Jersey correspondence of the late M. Alexis. She passes here as Mme. Rozel, a fisherman's——"

"Fisherman's fiddlestick!" interrupted his leader impatiently. "Do you think I am as blind as the people of Porhoët?"

"But I do not know her other name, if she have another," said the Breton. "I do not even know that of the late M. Alexis, but doubtless Monsieur Augustin knows it."

La Vireville did know it, or thought he did. Under that cognomen, he believed, had been concealed the identity of a gentleman from the St. Pol de Léon country, a M. de Kérouan or something of the sort.

This, however, did not help him much, and when Mme. Rozel came back he found himself observing her for the next few minutes with an increasing interest. Her face was rather pale, with an intense clear pallor that was accentuated rather than reduced by the lamplight, and she had wide, beautiful brows. The mouth was sad and resolute; her whole expression was sad, but it was resolute too, and when suddenly she lifted her eyes and looked her guest full in the face he received, for the second time since his entrance, an unmistakable shock. They were, unquestionably, the most expressive eyes he had ever seen in a woman. The Chevalier de la Vireville divined in his hostess depths which it had been interesting to explore had not both leisure and inclination been lacking to him.

Mme. Rozel, however, veiled those eyes again and said very little, and after a time Grain d'Orge rose, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, crossed himself, muttered a prayer, and announced that he was going out to watch the roads and would not be back till morning. But La Vireville still sat on at the table, the lamplight beating full on his own lean, strongly-marked features, with their look of humour and daring, on the cleft in his determined chin, and on his dark hair, clubbed and ribboned indeed, but somewhat disordered from the sea-wind. Yet it was curiosity, not hunger, which kept him there, his half-emptied glass between his fingers, engaging his hostess in talk almost perceptibly against her will. Her replies were very brief, and at first he himself made wary conversational moves; for though he really placed almost absolute reliance on Grain d'Orge's knowledge and discretion in a matter of this kind, yet there existed always, in this business, a need for caution, and there was just the hundredth part of a chance that she was not, after all, what that astute old Chouan asserted her to be—the agent de la correspondance. But Mme. Rozel's prudence, if anything,

exceeded his own; indeed, after a little fencing on both sides it began to seem to La Vireville that she was—necessary circumspection apart—a trifle hostile to him. Possibly she, on her side, felt that he might not be what Grain d'Orge, when he made arrangements for her to receive him, had given him out to be. And yet, from the trend of their guarded converse, it seemed rather that she tacitly resented his coming to take the dead leader's place—for so much she allowed him to gather that she knew of his purpose. But why should she resent it?

He suddenly fired a direct question at her.

"Have you any reason to believe, Madame, that the death of the late M. Alexis was due to anything other than the fortunes of war? I have heard a rumour of treachery. It is true, at any rate, is it not, that he was surprised?"

He saw the swift colour rush over her face, and flee in an instant, leaving her ivory pallor still more pale. Instead of answering him she got up, and took the remains of the loaf to put away in the press against the wall—a pretext, the questioner was sure, to withdraw her face from his further observation.

"Yes, he was surprised," she said in a low voice, her back to him. "He was sitting at table in the farm. It was all over very suddenly. He was . . . he was shot through the head. He did not suffer. . . . O my God," she burst out suddenly, "if only I *knew* whether it was treachery or no—and if so, whose!"

Yes, there were indeed hidden fires there! The vehemence, the breaking passion in her voice, had somehow jerked La Vireville, lame as he was, to his feet. The question flashed through him, What then had been Mme. Rozel's relations with the slain 'Alexis' that she felt his loss thus acutely? Purely those of political partisanship? Or had she, perchance, been his mistress? The thing was not unknown among the Royalist leaders in the West of France, though it was rare. There was Charles du Boishardy himself

as an example—to be, in fact, in a few weeks a fatal example—of laxity in that respect, and, to cite a greater name, Charette's reputation was by no means conformable to that of the unblemished first leaders of the grande guerre, the Vendée, whose work he carried on.

With that cry, wrung so evidently from a torn heart, M. Alexis' agent had swung round from the press, and was looking full at the man who faced her across the table by which he was supporting himself.

"Que diable!" thought the émigré, "I verily believe she thinks *I* had something to do with that ball in the head!"

Whether his surmise was painted on his countenance, or for whatever reason, Mme. Rozel next instant recovered herself, and removed those accusing eyes—if they were accusing.

"Pardon me, Monsieur," she said hurriedly, "and pray be seated again. I was so . . . so intimately associated with the plans and hopes of Monsieur Alexis that I have felt his death, I confess, very deeply."

"That is easy to understand, Madame," replied her guest, dropping back, at her bidding, in his chair. "You will perhaps permit me to offer my most sincere condolences on what is, besides, a very great loss to our cause. I hope, however, that since I am here by M. du Boishardy's express wish, and not by any desire of my own, that I may count on your co-operation?"

She too had sat down again, after that brief outburst, and seemed to have got rid, perhaps by its means, of some of her latent hostility. "As long as I can, Monsieur, certainly," she said, sighing, her cheek on her hand. "But my work here is done, and I leave in a day or two for the Channel Islands."

And at that piece of information La Vireville no longer felt any doubts as to the nature of the bond which had united her to the departed leader. He had another thought, too, about the fundamental drawback of employing a woman in a position such

as hers—a point on which he kept on other counts an open mind, even recognising certain advantages in it. "A man," he said to himself now, "would not resign a post like this just because his superior officer was killed. A change of leadership is just the time when she could have proved herself of most use."

"I regret to hear that, Madame," he said aloud, drily.

"It was my—Monsieur Alexis' express wish if anything happened to him," said she, as if aware of the unspoken criticism, as if careless, too, what implications of intimacy were contained in that avowal.

15940

CHAPTER XVII

STRANGE CONDUCT OF THE AGENT

(1)

HALF an hour later M. de la Vireville's half-perfunctory, half-condemnatory regret at Mme. Rozel's approaching departure was a much more genuine and a deeper feeling. At his request she had been giving him particulars about the arrangements of the correspondence at Porhoët, so that he or his delegate could take steps for it to be carried on with as little interruption as might be. And he very quickly saw that she was the right person for the post—a remarkable woman, full of intelligence and resource. M. de Kérouan had been lucky in his 'agent.' And yet, in talking to her much more frankly than he had yet done, or she to him, he could not help speculating as to where that passionate soul which he guessed to be yoked with so much understanding and will might one day lead her. He was to know before long.

She ended by warning him that she thought it would be well in the future to choose some other place on the coast for the Jersey correspondence. The new mayor was exhibiting a certain amount of suspicion and zeal. She hoped that Monsieur Augustin's landing had not been observed; she had warned Grain d'Orge to be very careful. Fortuné, who was a little surprised to learn that so small a place had a mayor at all, thereupon described with some humour the form which Grain d'Orge's inspired caution had taken.

And after this their talk, late as it was, began to range farther afield into the past, and somehow La Vireville found himself touching on his own previous experiences of exile, for he had been in the army of the Princes in 1792.

"I hated Coblentz when I was there," he said frankly, finishing his wine at last. "It is true I was pretty near starving at the time."

And suddenly he felt Mme Rozel's recovering confidence in him retract, as a sea-anemone shrinks up at the touch of a finger.

"Ah, you have been at Coblentz, Monsieur," she said slowly, looking at him with a curious expression. "When exactly was that, if I may ask?"

He told her, within a week or two of the precise date, as well as he could remember. "You have been there too, Madame?" he hazarded.

"No; I have never been to Coblentz," she answered. Her eyes, that held a more ready speech than her lips, had clouded over, and he could almost see her thoughts playing round that Mecca of the French emigration. Again he wondered why.

He talked on a little more, but the mention of Coblentz seemed to have broken the spell, and he suddenly remembered that it was very late—or, rather, very early.

"I will ask your permission to retire, Madame," said he, a trifle formally. "I must be abroad before the village is awake—especially after what you have told me." He got to his feet, and stood leaning on the back of his chair, waiting for his dismissal. She too got up, and, after lighting a rushlight, threw a glance at the ladder-like stairs in the corner behind her. "I must apologise for your quarters, Monsieur Augustin. They are little better than a loft, I fear. Do you think that, crippled as you are, you can manage that steep ascent? And how will you get to Carhoët to-morrow?"

"I leave that to Grain d'Orge, Madame," replied

the émigré. "He is a person of resource in his own line. Besides, I hope that my foot will be better."

The mention of his destination had reminded him of something, and he thrust a hand into his breast. "You were good enough, Madame, to give me some names at Carhoët, and so, to avoid disturbing you in the morning, may I ask you to write them down for me now? I have some paper here."

He drew out from an inner pocket a small bundle of loose letters, a couple of which incontinently slipped to the floor. Before he could prevent her she had stooped to pick them up, and had laid them at his elbow on the table. Thanking her, he meanwhile tore off a blank sheet from his correspondence.

"Now, if you would be so good, Madame," he said, handing her the piece of paper and instinctively looking round for pen and ink.

But Mme. Rozel, at his side, was staring as if transfixed at one of the letters she had rescued, now lying face upwards between them on the table.

"Is that your real name, Monsieur Augustin?" she asked, in an odd voice, pointing to the letter.

Now in Brittany La Vireville's nom de guerre was so much more significant than his own—which, as has been said, he made some endeavours to keep distinct from it—that it was second nature to him to be called by it, and he had never even thought of informing her of the latter. In Brittany communications also were addressed to "M. Augustin." But the topmost of the two letters which his hostess had picked up chanced to be a note from the Prince de Bouillon sent to him during his recent stay at St. Helier, and, presumably for that reason, directed to him in his real name. Hence a large "M. de la Vireville" looked up at them both from the table, for His Serene Highness wrote no crabbed hand.

"Why, yes, Madame," answered the owner carelessly. "Did you not know it? I had no intention of keeping you in the dark on the point"

"Nor had I any intention of . . . prying," she said, and, catching up the two letters, she held them out to him almost feverishly. "I will give you the names you want at once." She well-nigh snatched from him the piece of paper he was holding. "Where is the pen?"

Thoroughly puzzled, La Vireville watched her as, with set mouth and face as white as the paper itself, she wrote out the list he required. Why should his name so discompose her? M. de Kérouan, whom he had never met, had evidently not mentioned it to her while he was alive—possibly did not even know it himself. It was not as if their commands had been contiguous. But why should his 'agent' find the discovery so extremely disconcerting? Was it possible that she, like Mme. de Chaulnes . . .? No, that he could not credit for a moment. It was on the tip of his tongue to pursue the subject—and he knew he was rather a fool not to do so—but somehow he was too sorry for her to probe her distress to-night. She had but recently lost her lover, and she was so pale! When she gave him the list he merely thanked her, and bent over her hand for a moment with a grace oddly at variance with its surroundings. The hand in question was very cold.

Once again, as he took up the rushlight, she began an apology, scarcely audible, for the poorness of his quarters, and the difficulty of getting to them.

"A night in the hayloft used to be the summit of my ambition, Madame, when I was a child," replied he gaily. "I only hope that you will sleep as well as I shall." And with that he limped away to the stairs.

The ascent, indeed, was not too easy to him. At the top a last prompting of curiosity urged him to glance back over his shoulder down into the room. But his hostess was no longer visible, and he opened the door at the top of the ladder-stairs to find himself in a small, bare apartment, containing little save a

truckle-bed under the window, with a rush-bottomed chair beside it, a press built into the wall by the door, and a crucifix.

Having ascertained that the crazy door possessed no means of fastening other than a latch, and a bolt on the outside, La Vireville set down the light on a chair and threw off his outer garments with celerity. He had the habit of seizing sleep when he could get it, and in Brittany a bed was something of a luxury. And though in Porhoët village he was probably less safe than he would have been sleeping, as usual, with his men in the lee of a hedge under the open sky, and knew it, and though his curiosity, if not his suspicions, had lately suffered a rousing prick, and though—more disturbing than either—his foot ached persistently, ere a quarter of an hour had elapsed he was in the enjoyment of a very refreshing slumber.

(2)

Perhaps if the guest could have known how his hostess spent the night he might have slept less well; perhaps, even, if, when he had looked back from the head of the stairs, he had seen how she stood rigid against the wall, in the lake of shadow by the press, her hands clenched at her sides, like one who has encountered some terrible vision, he might have descended to prosecute the inquiry he had abandoned. Perhaps he might have felt compassion at the tormented, desperate face she wore as the hours crept on towards morning, and everyone brought conviction nearer to her, yet no guidance. "It is he! it must be he!" she said aloud, not once but many times. "He was at Coblentz then—he acknowledged it. Oh, was it god or devil showed me his name? . . . André, André, my darling, tell me what I am to do!" Rent with sobs, she would cease her agonised pacing to and fro, and throw herself down by the table, her head

on her outstretched arms. . . . But of these phenomena La Vireville was not a witness.

And soon the dawn was stealing in, comfortless. Mme. Rozel extinguished the lamp, and sat, her hands locked tight together. As the daylight grew, so did the light in her eyes—a steady beacon. Her mouth hardened itself into an inflexible line, and at last, rising as one whose mind is irrevocably set, she began to go cautiously up the stairs to La Vireville's room.

So light was her tread that the steps did not creak. The door yielded to her touch. She went in, noiseless as a ghost, her face like a ghost's save for the flame in her eyes.

Under the tiny window, a little turned on his side, and with one arm crooked beneath his head, her guest lay in a profound sleep. She stood a minute by the door, then crept nearer and looked down at him long and steadily. Yes, it must be he! Here were the same features, as they had been painted to her; the same hair and brows, the same cleft in the chin. The mounting tide of hatred began to lift her off her feet. . . . And even while she studied his sleeping face she saw, hanging from the back of the chair by the bedside, a hunting-knife—his own.

She was not conscious of putting out her hand for it, still less of drawing it from its sheath, yet the moment after the bright blade was somehow in her grip. How absolutely he lay at her mercy!—and so still that his breathing scarcely lifted his half-open shirt. Staring down at the strong, bare throat she suddenly turned giddy. . . .

How far—or how little distance—would that wave of feeling have carried her? Next instant two eyes, quite calm and very alert, were looking up into hers, and the hand that had been under the sleeper's head held her wrist in a clutch like fate.

"Madame, private theatricals are out of fashion," said La Vireville in a lazy voice. A twist of his powerful fingers, and the hunting-knife dropped from

her grasp to the coverlet, where his other hand secured it. "My own knife too! May I ask why you were rehearsing this dramatic scene?"

All the while he lay and looked up at her, too contemptuous, it seemed, to be at the trouble of raising himself, so long as he had her wrist prisoner in that hopeless grasp of his. White, silent, choking, her other hand at her throat, she did not even make an attempt to wrench herself away. At last, when her captor had run on a little more, he loosed his hold. "You can go, my fair assassin! In whose pay are you, by the way?"

She paid no heed to the taunt, but, having reached the door, she turned, and spoke in a voice rendered unsteady neither by fear nor shame, but by some more positive emotion.

"Listen, M. de la Vireville, and I will tell you my name. I am Raymonde de Guéfontaine—Raymonde du Coudrais, the sister of André du Coudrais, the man whom you hounded out of Coblentz on a lying charge of cheating at cards, whose reputation you blasted with your tongue, whose health you ruined with your sword! And now, before he is cold in his grave—murdered, for all I know, by your connivance—you come to claim his place! Oh, it is too much! After all, cold steel, could I have used it, is too good for you! I know a better way—a more fitting——"

"*Du Coudrais!*" broke in the thunderstruck La Vireville, on his elbow. "'Alexis' was du Coudrais! But he . . . it was——"

"Ah, you remember!" cried she, unheeding. "You remember that night at the Three Crowns, and the morning after! Till now you had forgotten, perhaps? Otherwise, surely, you would scarcely have dared to come—even you! I had heard a whisper of your name, but I did not believe——"

"Stop!" cried La Vireville, breaking in, in his turn. "I assure you——"

Her hand was already on the door. "Too late,

M. le Marquis ! What is done is done. But you shall never step into André's shoes. And at least you know now why I am going to give you up ! "

" The devil you are ! " said La Vireville, with a very grim face. The pistol in his hand covered her with a perfectly steady aim. " There is this between you and your hospitable project, Mme. de Guéfontaine ! " He cocked it.

She stood flattened against the door, wide-eyed, scarcely breathing, but not attempting to move.

" Now swear," commanded the émigré, " swear on the crucifix there that you will do no such thing ! Otherwise I shall fire ! " For he knew that she would be through the door before he could spring on her.

" I will not swear ! " cried she, her face a white flame. " Shoot me if you will—you can do no worse to me than you have already done through André—but if you do not shoot me, as sure as there is a God above us, I shall summon the National Guard of this place to take you ! "

Though the colour of a sheet, she did not flinch before the barrel, not ten feet away. La Vireville set his teeth, and himself changed colour. But he could not do it. The pistol sank.

" Madame," he said, in his usual careless tone, " if you are treacherous you are devilish well-plucked. I wish I were as strong-minded. Go and fetch the National Guard then, and be damned to it ! "

CHAPTER XVIII

EQUALLY SURPRISING CONDUCT OF "MONSIEUR AUGUSTIN"

(1)

FIVE seconds, no more, did Fortuné de la Vireville allow himself wherein to reflect that he found himself, as the door was shut and the bolt slid into place, in one of the most unpleasant situations of his life; ten to formulate a plan—a very precarious and weak-kneed plan—of escape therefrom, and about a minute and a half to scramble into the rest of his clothes. He could have done this quicker but for his foot, which hampered him at every turn. Then, kneeling on the bed, he pushed the little casement wide, tore off the sheets, knotted them together, twisted them round into the semblance of a rope, made one end fast to the head of the bed, and threw the slack out of the window. But he did not climb down it. Nor did he attempt to break open the door, which he could probably have done with ease. To escape in either of those ways before the house was surrounded would necessitate running, and, unfortunately, he could not run. But he trusted that the sheet hanging out of the window would convince the National Guard that he *had* run. . . . He thrust his pistols into his belt, picked up his hunting-knife—a smile flitted across his face as he touched it—and limped across the room to his chosen refuge.

If it was a refuge! For his life depended at that moment on what Mme. de Guéfontaine, the 'fisherman's widow,' had a habit of storing in the large press built

into the side of the little room. If it were linen, or anything that required the presence of shelves, then—"Good-night, my friend!" said La Vireville to himself.

"But no!—one enters!" he finished, when the door stood wide. There was nothing at all in the cupboard but a row of pegs, from one of which depended, oddly enough, a tricolour sash. So he went in.

The place had a strange, stuffy smell. Light, but not much air, came under the flimsy double doors, and between them. "And if I am to stay here long," thought La Vireville, "a chair would be very acceptable;" for it was tiring to stand, as he was doing, practically on one leg. If he sat upon the floor he could not make much of a fight of it, supposing the necessity arose. He was beginning seriously to contemplate emerging to fetch the chair when he heard numerous and hurried steps on the steep stairway outside. "This cannot, surely, be the National Guard already," thought their quarry. "The vindictive lady has not had the time to summon them!" For he remembered noticing last night that Mme. Rozel's cottage stood at a little distance from Porhoët itself.

Nevertheless the visitors' method of procedure pointed to a raid. Some form of battering ram, presumably the butt of a musket, was hastily applied to the door of the room. A very little hammering, and the portal fell inwards with a crash. As it was fastened on the outside only, the refugee was tickled at this evidence of local zeal. "If these individuals look into this cupboard I fear they will be very ungentle with me," he reflected, a pistol in either hand. "Let me see to it, in that case, that their numbers are somewhat reduced."

But he had no need of his weapons; his ruse had been enough for these simple and enthusiastic souls. La Vireville heard a wild rush to the window and the (as he had hoped) convincing sheet; thereafter cries, stampings, curses, and voices proclaiming that the

Chouan had escaped by the window, and that the woman Rozel, in league with him, had warned him.

"Hardly the way that I should have put it!" thought the fugitive.

And from that indictment of complicity to avenging action was but a step. "Arrest her! arrest her!" shouted several voices. And with a fresh rush down the stairs, with noise and loud talking from below, and what La Vireville half took to be a stifled scream, this was evidently accomplished. Five minutes had seen the development of the whole drama.

(2)

With the loud banging of the cottage door a great and signal silence fell upon the dwelling of the 'fisherman's widow,' even upon the cupboard upstairs and its occupant. For La Vireville was filled in the first place with an access of prudence which urged him to make no sound until he was tolerably sure that the house was really empty; in the second with a certain ironical satisfaction. Into a memory not over well stored with such literature had come the words of the Psalmist concerning such as dug a pit and fell into the midst of it themselves, and he stayed to savour them. Poor Mme. de Guéfontaine! she had paid dearly for her vengeful instincts. Moreover, in spite of the poetical justice which had overtaken her, she might have that revenge even yet. La Vireville was helpless, even in the empty house. Grain d'Orge would certainly not come till dusk, always supposing that he were free to come at all. Before his advent, too, the village authorities might return to search the house; it seemed strange, indeed, that they had not already done so.

But, however precarious one's position, it is impossible to live without food. La Vireville hobbled downstairs and found a loaf of bread and some sour

milk, with which he clambered back to his little room. Eating the bread thoughtfully, as he sat on his devastated bed, he considered the case of Mme. de Guéfontaine. So 'Alexis' had been the unfortunate du Coudrais, the victim of an odious charge made against him (whether in good faith or for some ulterior object Fortuné had never felt quite sure) by a near kinsman of La Vireville's own, the Marquis of that name! La Vireville himself had only arrived at Coblentz a few days after the duel which ensued upon the Marquis's denunciation of du Coudrais at the Three Crowns, to which Mme. de Guéfontaine had made hot reference; but émigré circles were still ringing with the scandal, and the Marquis de la Vireville, his own arm in a sling, was better able to explain to his cousin how he had run du Coudrais through the lungs than to satisfy him—or anybody else—of the ill-starred gentleman's dishonour. But du Coudrais, when he recovered from his wound, had to leave Coblentz nevertheless . . . and, having left it, was abundantly cleared, too late, of the charge against him by the dramatic unmasking of another man as a professional sharper. And for this affair, in which, ironically enough, La Vireville had by no means supported his cousin, of whose past record he knew too much, he had been himself within an ace of paying the penalty—might, indeed, yet pay it.

It was quite clear to him why Mme. de Guéfontaine had taken him for her late brother's aggressor. He had confessed to his name, he had mentioned having been at Coblentz at the time, and he bore a close family resemblance to his kinsman—close enough, at least, to deceive anyone who relied merely on a verbal description; for it was tolerably certain that Mme. de Guéfontaine had never seen the Marquis de la Vireville. Evidently she had been devotedly attached to her brother: had shared in his schemes, worked and plotted for him here at Porhoët, in a position of no small danger, and then, fresh from the shock of that brother's violent

death, was called upon—so she thought—to shelter and to help to install in his place the man who had been his worst enemy! She was a woman of strong feelings; she had found the situation, as she had declared to him, intolerable, and in a moment of wild impulse she had resolved to put a term to it and to avenge her brother in one and the same act. And, reviewing the episode dispassionately, La Vireville found he could not blame her overmuch . . . especially as she had failed. True, there was always something of a nauseous flavour about delation, but the matter of the cold steel had a primitive and heroic touch—Jael and Sisera. "And if," he said to himself, "if I had given her a minute longer she need not have been put to the shift of betraying me to the authorities!" . . . Yet, after all, he doubted whether she would have had the nerve to use the knife. And, whatever her intentions with regard to the National Guard, it was by no means certain that she had carried them out. He did not see how she could have done so in the time. And because he found himself oddly reluctant to associate her with the idea of just that form of treachery, he settled that she had *not* had time. . . . But she was, no doubt of it, a remarkable woman!

And so, commending her spirit, as though he had not nearly been its victim, La Vireville arrived, as the long, featureless day was beginning to close in, at a certain decision.

When the dusk had quite fallen the owl's cry, as he had expected, came prudently to his ears. He answered it, and in a little while the countenance of Grain d'Orge was visible at the window, whence the misleading sheet still trailed into the garden.

"Come in," said his leader, without moving from the chair whereon he sat, with his legs extended on another. "A pretty sort of refuge you selected for me!"

The Chouan scrambled over the sill on to the bed, and broke into violent and ashamed protestations.

mingled with horrible curses on the unknown informer. It was plain that he did not suspect where the guilt really lay.

"Never mind," remarked La Vireville carelessly. "I have fallen upon circumstances which you could not possibly have foreseen, and I harbour no grudge against you, mon gars. But have you any plan for getting me away?"

"There will be two horses to-night at the cross-roads, a quarter of a mile away, if you think you can get so far, Monsieur Augustin, and if we have the luck not to be seen."

"I can get there," said La Vireville. "Repose has benefited my foot. But we have a little matter that demands our attention in Porhoët first. You know that Mme. Rozel has been arrested?"

"Yes, the poor woman!"

"The poor woman, as you say. Well, before we leave this place I am minded to repay her hospitality. We must remember, too, that she was the defunct M. Alexis' agent here, and has deserved well of the King's cause. It will therefore be our business, before proceeding to Carhoët, to set her at liberty."

"Monsieur is joking!" said the Chouan, his jaw dropped.

And it took La Vireville, with all his authority, quite twenty minutes to extract from his horrified follower what he knew of the conditions of Mme. Rozel's captivity, and to reduce him, on the point of an attempt at rescue, to an incredibly sulky submission.

"I am about to become a Republican to that end," announced the émigré when this result had at last been attained. "Do you fancy me in the rôle, Grain d'Orge?" And, limping to the cupboard, he snatched the tricolour sash off the peg, wound it twice round his waist and tied a flamboyant bow at the left side.

Mingled horror and disgust strove in the Breton's face.

"For God's sake, Monsieur Augustin!" he protested.

"Citizen Augustin, if you please," corrected La Vireville with dignity. "I have, unfortunately, no cockade. Never mind; it is dark. But we want some little scrap of writing on official paper—just to make an effect. . . . I have it!" and he took from the breast of his coat the Government proclamation for his own head.

"With a trifle of manipulation . . ." said he. "Grain d'Orge, descend into our parlour and bring me the pen and ink that is there."

Unspeakably sullen, the Chouan obeyed, and when La Vireville had, by doubling up the paper, secured a blank space under the "In the name of the Republic one and indivisible," he executed thereon a few specious forgeries and waved the paper about to dry it.

"Observe, my good Grain d'Orge," he said, "to what virtuous use can things evil be put. This paper, instead of being a brave man's death-warrant, shall bring liberty to a woman . . . who very little deserves it," he added to himself. "More, my faithful follower," he pursued impressively, "if you understood better what I was doing, you would be lost in admiration at the nobility of my character. I own that I am myself so lost."

"I understand this, M. le Chevalier," retorted the Breton with passion, "that you are mad, stark mad, to go playing your head like this! The woman Rozel has bewitched you."

"I believe you are right," answered his leader. "And she did it with a knife—my own! It is a potent spell, if an unusual. But you surely would not have a gentleman leave a woman to her fate, be she enchantress or no? . . . Well, we must have our horses before we can pay our visit to the Citizen Botidoux —that, I think you said, was the mayor's name. You can go first down the sheet and steady it for me."

It is not altogether surprising that Grain d'Orge,

when his master slid to earth beside him, was muttering mingled prayers and imprecations. La Vireville smiled to himself as he leant his weight on that faithful arm, and the two moved off into the darkness.

(3)

About a quarter after midnight, M. Jacques-Pierre Botidoux, grocer and mayor, sleeping peacefully beside his wife, was aware of a very persistent knocking upon the door of his little shop below him. Arising, not without lamentation, and thrusting a night-capped head out of the window, he was astounded to see in the street two shadowy figures on horseback.

"What do you want?" he shouted ill-temperedly.

The taller figure lifted a dim face. "Silence!" it said in a low, rapid, and singularly impressive voice. "Silence, Citizen, and come down to the door!"

And at M. Botidoux, when, dazed, cross, and sleepy, he finally unfastened his shop door, was launched an imperative demand for the key of the village lock-up. As he gaped at the mandate the tall rider bent from the saddle; a vast tricolour sash showed indistinctly round his middle as he moved his arm under his cloak. "Citizen, I am from the quarters at Carhoët, but I carry orders from the Convention itself. You are to deliver to me without delay the person of the woman Rozel, arrested by you this morning. You did well and wisely in so arresting her, but higher powers than you have need of her, and at once. A conspiracy of great extent . . . the State . . . information . . . you understand?"

"But . . . but . . ." began M. Botidoux, who did not understand at all.

The emissary of the Convention changed his tone. "Eh?" he said sharply. "Will not this satisfy you?" He flapped some kind of paper in the startled face. "Must I bring in my escort to convince you?"

"No, no!" stammered Botidoux. "No, Citizen Commissary, I will get the key, I will come at once!"

"That is well," responded the cloaked figure. "But, look you, not a word! It is of the utmost importance that no one in the village knows of this transfer of a prisoner of State. Others are not to be trusted as the Convention trusts you, Citizen! That is why I left my escort at the cross-roads, and came with only this good fellow to guide me."

"But the woman——"

"Do you think two able men cannot manage one woman, Mr. Mayor?"

Very soon the short, stout, and rattled Botidoux was trotting by the side of the silent horsemen, was leading them towards the little house standing back from the street which served as a lock-up for drunkards. Porhoët was not of sufficient importance for a jail. Towards this Botidoux vanished, important, if puzzled, and in a little while reappeared, bringing by the wrist the figure of a woman. Some other man was vaguely discernible in the background.

"Put her up in front of the guide," ordered the Commissary, who seemed to have no wish to dismount.

Mme. Rozel must have recognised his voice, for she gave a faint scream, which Botidoux had the wit to smother ere he lifted her into Grain d'Orge's unwilling arms. But once there the captive began a fresh protest.

"Where are you taking me—who is it?" she cried, struggling. But, since expostulations were only to be expected in her situation, M. Botidoux was not at all perturbed.

"Be silent, woman!" he urged; and as the riders, turning their steeds, began to move down the street, he added, "I think your escort has come to look for you, M. le Commissaire."

"What!" exclaimed La Vireville, startled out of his sangfroid. "By God, it's true!" For he had

heard the jingle of bits at the end of the street. It could be nothing else but the cavalry detachment from Carhoët out to hunt for him.

He uttered a very pretty and comprehensive curse, and turned his horse's head in the opposite direction. "Come on, we must ride for it! Come on, I say!" Grain d'Orge's mount—a grey—sprang forward, and Mme. Rozel screamed again. A shout answered her from a point nearer than the oncoming hussars—from another little group of horses, imperfectly seen, on the left, whose riders were mounting in haste.

"Madame, you have lost us all!" said La Vireville furiously. "Ride like the devil, Grain d'Orge; straight on—straight on, I tell you! I'm going back; they will come after me!" He tugged at his bewildered steed, brought it slithering to its haunches, swung round yet again, and set off in the direction of the hussars at the end of the street.

As he had hoped, the mounting men on their left, confused, hesitated a moment, then decided to follow him and not the doubly-burdened grey. In front was the stationary, or almost stationary, cavalry, as yet only one vague bunch on the road. But, much as La Vireville would have liked to try it, he could scarcely venture to ride past or through them. He checked his horse, hoping that what he took to be a hedge on his left hand was really a hedge, and put the animal at it, somewhat expecting to land in a garden or an orchard. But, apparently, he was in a field, and a large one at that. On the grass he urged his excited horse into a frantic gallop, his blood racing not unpleasantly. Shouts told him that other horsemen had also cleared the hedge and were after him. "I wonder what I shall ride into in this cursed darkness?" he thought. And he thought also, "I did not expect she would be a woman to scream. . . ." Something black rose before him—the usual Breton field hedge, a six-foot bank with forest trees atop, impossible to negotiate on horseback. Should he then

abandon his mount ? He had but a second in which to make up his mind, for his pursuers, better horsed, were inevitably gaining on him. No, he would go on, and, trusting to find the échalier—the low, ladder-like gate of those parts—he cantered for a moment alongside the bank.

Here, judging by the cessation of the dark mound and its crown of trees, was what he sought. He put his horse at the gap. As he rose, a spattering fire rang out ; a bullet sang past his cheek, there was a most unpleasant sensation of a jerking fall, and he found himself among a great deal of wet grass, with his injured foot excruciatingly pinned beneath the weight of his struggling horse. La Vireville instinctively stuffed the back of his hand into his mouth to prevent himself from screaming out, saw all the stars of the dark heaven swoop down on him, and incontinently fainted.

CHAPTER XIX

La Porte du Manoir

(1)

A cold and grey light was in the sky when La Vireville came back to consciousness, and, for the moment greatly puzzled, raised his head and looked about him. There was no fallen horse, no sign of hussars, nothing left of the night's doings but a sick feeling in the mouth, a bruised shoulder, and a foot that ached ten thousand times worse than he had ever thought a foot could ache. But, as he struggled to one elbow, he saw another relic—the tricolour sash about his body. He surveyed it without much approbation. Was it that symbol which had saved him? No; it had been too dark when he came down; they could not have seen it. Had they thought him killed, then, and ridden off and left him? Hardly, because if they knew whom they were hunting, which was probable, they would have been anxious for the reward, since he was equally marketable alive or dead—did he not carry that guarantee on his person? And where was his wounded horse? He came at last to the conclusion that his steed must have picked itself up and galloped on, and that the hussars had pursued it, not seeing that it was riderless, or that their quarry was lying at their mercy by the échalier. They must almost have ridden over him as he lay senseless. All of which was very miraculous, and seemed to denote a special care on the part of Providence that was encouraging. "If only the brute had chosen my other

foot to roll on!" thought the victim. "But of course he would not!"

However, long as the grass was, and early as the hour, it was unbecoming to lie there like a lame sheep and wait to be picked up. A coppice ran along the side of this second field, and towards this, on his hands and knees, the ends of the tricolour sash dragging in the wet grass, La Vireville made his way. And in the coppice, having drunk some brandy, cut off his slashed boot and applied the same restorative to his swollen foot, he very stoically lay down under an oak, thinking to sleep. That solace, however, he could not compass; his foot hurt too much. Moreover, he had a fairly knotty problem to solve—how best to remove himself from his present environment to a safer. And he saw no way, short of crawling or hopping. For even if he were physically capable of working his way towards Carhoët he could only safely do it under cover of darkness, and for darkness, near as he was to Porhoët, he could not afford to wait. "I was really better in my cupboard," he reflected. Certainly his knight-errantry, if it had proved of any avail for the lady—which was more than doubtful—had left its author in no happy plight.

And at last it was borne in upon La Vireville that, daylight or no daylight, he must somehow set a greater distance between himself and the now enlightened village of Porhoët. With luck, the copse where he lay might turn out to be a spur of the wood of Roscanvel, which he knew, from a previous study of the map, to be somewhere thereabouts. In that case, by going a little farther he might find shelter till the evening, even if he had to climb a tree to attain it. He sighed, sat up, and tried to draw the remains of his boot over his foot—an attempt that proved out of the question. So he tied up the injured member as best he could, cut himself a stout stick out of the coppice, and, just as the first rays of the sun began to strike through the trees, set his face towards the thickness of the wood.

(2)

Because it had been raining hard since ten in the morning—though now, by sunset, it had ceased—the bad road was exceedingly muddy and full of extensive pools. These it was at the moment so profoundly delighting a small male child to stir up with a twig that he did not observe the slow approach of a wayfarer, nor look up till he heard himself addressed. He then saw a tall man leaning upon a stick and wearing only one boot. He was bareheaded, wet, and very pale ; but he wore a tricolour sash.

" Child," said the apparition, and its voice sounded strange and small, like the voice of Uncle Pierre when he was ill of the fever—" child, is there any house along this road . . . not far away ? "

The boy was frightened, and much desired to return no answer at all, but he knew that you must not trifle with those who wore the tricolour scarf, or it would be the worse for you. So, rubbing his bare toes for solace in the delicious mud, he responded truthfully :

" Round the next corner, Citizen, you will see the old manoir of L'Estournel. But nobody lives there, and it is full of ghosts, witches, and all manner of evil things. One does not pass it after dark."

" Thank you," said the man with the tricolour. And adding solemnly, " May you live to be an ornament to your country," he gave him a silver piece and limped on. The boy watched him with open mouth till he disappeared round the bend.

It seemed to La Vireville that he had never known the possession of two sound feet ; also, that he had been walking for several days, though it was only at noon that he had left the forest, which had not proved a very happy resting-place. But since then he had set he knew not how many miles between himself and Porhoët ; indeed, by now he had almost lost count of direction. He was wet and hungry, while his foot

was a plaster of mud, blood, and devouring pain. Finally, he was on an open road, where he little desired to find himself. But he hoped now to force an entrance into the deserted house.

Round the turn of the road he saw it at last, steep-roofed, peering greyly at him over its high wall. All round it the overgrown trees flamed with spring and sunset, and, behind, two slim poplars mounted like spires to heaven. The wall brimmed with the stems of matted creepers, and in it, sheltered in a stone archway with a living thatch of grass, was an old green door. He would go through this and rest.

As he had the thought, La Vireville's heart stood still, for he had caught the sound of many hoofs in front of him. Was he neatly trapped after all his fatigue and pain? Then at least he would not be taken alive, nor die with their accursed rag on his body! He tore off the sash and flung it into the ditch, drew behind the row of chestnuts which fringed the road —a perfectly inadequate cover—and, a hand on each pistol, waited. . . .

And they passed, at a canter, half a squadron of red hussars, looking neither to right nor left!

Strong-nerved as he was, Fortuné de la Vireville turned a moment giddy with the revulsion. Then once more he saw the trees beckoning over the wall, the friendly green door, the grey roofs. If only he could get inside he could at least drop down in peace in the garden, and after that he cared little what happened. He hobbled forward, steadying himself from chestnut to chestnut. In all the rainpools the sunset gleamed, and the reflection bothered him, dancing up and down. "I must reach the door! I must reach the door!" he kept repeating. Only twenty-five steps farther, perhaps . . . or count it by trees, that was better. . . . The effort of keeping his head steady in the dizzying pain was as difficult as the actual walking. At last he had shuffled across the road, and was at the old green door, and dared not try whether it

were fastened. La Vireville had never in his life, he thought, desired anything so vehemently as to be able to pass it—though in truth he knew not if he should find safety on the other side. . . . The latch was stiff; his fingers seemed stiffening too. . . . It lifted, the door gave, creaking on its old hinges, and he found himself inside. He had just enough sense to close it after him.

Within, it was all as he had guessed it would be, of a neglect so ancient that every growing thing had set itself to repair and clothe it. But all that he saw clearly was the great, nail-studded door above the flight of shallow steps, for it stood wide open, and through the archway, framed in a tangle of still rust-coloured creeper, was cool darkness. It drew him more than the rioting garden, and he got himself somehow up the steps. And, once in the place, that was half-hall, half-kitchen, and that was lofty, with many great beams, he knew himself to be vanquished, for there was mist before his eyes and the sea in his ears. Yet he staggered as far as the huge old table, thick in dust, that stood before the great empty hearth, before he felt himself falling. He made a grab at the oak, missed it, stood swaying, and then sank heavily to the cold hearthstone. Consciousness had left him before he reached it.

(3)

When the familiar pain in his foot laid hold of him once more, and pulled him up, reluctant, from this happy blankness he was aware, as he came, of other sensations. Something wet and cold, smelling strongly of brandy, was passing slowly over his forehead; something hard was rubbing one of his hands. A voice said, "He is coming to," and this being now his own opinion, La Vireville opened his eyes.

He was lying where he had fallen, but his head was

resting in the crook of someone's arm. On the other side knelt Grain d'Orge, chafing one of his hands between his own horny palms; he looked ridiculously lugubrious. La Vireville stirred.

"You are safe, Monsieur, you are safe!" said a woman's voice above him—a voice with a break in it. "Oh, your poor foot!"

The émigré removed his gaze from Grain d'Orge, who kissed the hand he was holding, and, looking up, beheld the face of Mme. de Guéfontaine, stamped with a new character of pity and tenderness. He concluded that she was no longer desirous of his blood. But how was it that she and Grain d'Orge were here? He tried to ask her, but the words were unaccountably difficult to say.

"You shall know in good time, Monsieur le Chevalier," she said gently. "Meanwhile, lie still. Grain d'Orge, roll up that cloak and put it under his head. . . . That is better." She slipped her arm from under La Vireville's head, and his eyes closed again in spite of himself. A little time passed; he heard the Chouan murmuring prayers. Then light fingers were unwrapping the rags from about his lacerated foot, and he felt on it the sting of water, deliciously cold. He reopened his eyes.

"I am afraid that I am giving you a great deal of trouble," he said slowly and politely to the kneeling figure.

Mme. de Guéfontaine lifted her head, and, to his amazement, the tears were running down her cheeks. "I did not betray you!" she said, clasping her hands together over the dripping cloth they held. "Oh, believe me, M. le Chevalier, whatever I said to you in my madness, I did not give you up! I could not do it—by the time I was downstairs again I was ashamed of having said I would. But, by the most evil chance, which I still cannot understand, the section having got wind, somehow, of your arrival, chose that very moment to break in to arrest you.

And when they found you, as they thought, gone they arrested me instead . . . and if it had not been for you . . . And you," — she finished brokenly, looking down at his foot,—" you went through all this for me, thinking I had betrayed you."

" Why," said La Vireville, with more animation, " if it comes to that, Madame, you were yourself under a slight misapprehension with regard to me ! "

" I know ! I know ! Oh, can you ever forgive me ! " she cried, leaving her task and kneeling down once more by his side. " I know now—it was your cousin the Marquis—but the name, the likeness, your having been at Coblentz—I felt so sure——"

" Then how do you know now ? " queried La Vireville, still more puzzled.

" Because," she answered, " I have had someone to tell me the truth. I told you that I was leaving Porhoët in a day or two. I was, in fact, expecting my other brother from Guernsey to take me away—he is in the Comte d'Oilliamson's regiment there. He was to meet me here at L'Estournel, rather than come to Porhoët, because the manoir was unoccupied, and we both knew it, as it belonged once to our kin. So I made Grain d'Orge bring me here ; it seemed the best thing to do, since we could not safely return to Porhoët, and Henri, when he came, could help Grain d'Orge to look for you."

She broke off, and returned to her ministrations.

" And then, Madame ? " suggested her patient.

" Henri was here waiting for me ! He had come earlier by a day than we had arranged And he told me about poor André—how that it was your cousin the Marquis. Indeed, I had been already prepared for this, because Grain d'Orge spoke once or twice of you as ' Monsieur le Chevalier.' . . . All day we have been searching for you, as best we could—my brother is not yet returned. (Oh, this foot . . . what you must have suffered !) But I, when I came in a little while ago and saw you lying like a dead man

across the hearthstone, I could scarcely believe it—and that fate had given me a chance after all of telling you that—a chance of undoing what I did——"

"What you did not do, rather," corrected La Vireville.

"But you thought I had—and yet you saved me!"

It was impossible categorically to deny this accusation, yet La Vireville was beginning to answer when a step was heard on the flagged floor, and Mme. de Guéfontaine sprang to her feet.

"Henri—he is here!"

And into the prostrate man's somewhat limited field of vision came a dark, good-looking young man whose resemblance to Mme. de Guéfontaine proclaimed his relationship. His sister slipped her arm into his.

("Now I wonder," thought Fortuné, "how far her fraternal affection for *this* brother would carry her!")

"Monsieur," began Henri du Coudrais, with emotion, standing looking down upon the Chouan, "I have no words to express my apologies, my gratitude, or my sense of your magnanimity. But why did you not tell my sister the truth?"

"Monsieur," replied La Vireville from the floor, "I began to do so, but . . . had not time to finish. And I do not think that I should have been believed. . . . But permit me to say, M. du Coudrais, that if I had a sister, and she had been placed in like circumstances, I could only be flattered if her affection for me had led her to do the same, in all things, as Madame has done."

Mme. de Guéfontaine lifted her head from her brother's shoulder, against which she had suddenly hidden her face. "In all things?" she repeated, stressing the words, and with something like a remembered horror in her eyes.

Fortuné de la Vireville raised himself a trifle, while his fingers, as if unconsciously, tapped out a little tune

on the handle of his hunting-knife. "Yes," he said, smiling at her meaningly and half-mischievously, "*in all things!*"

And the old beams, which had heard so many wise and foolish utterances, caught and flung to each other his perverse and fantastic condonation.

CHAPTER XX

Sea-Holly

(1)

The moon that night, peering through the half-shuttered windows of the manoir, spilt on the dark floor pools that reminded La Vireville of those others in the interminable wet road of the afternoon. Mme. de Guéfontaine and her brother had contrived for him a fairly comfortable resting-place by piling some old moth-eaten hangings and a cloak or two on the oak settle, and he had been made, despite his protests, to occupy this couch. But his foot pained him too much to admit of sleep.

From where he lay he could just see Mme. de Guéfontaine lying back in a great chair by the empty hearth, a cloak over her knees; and at one time the direct moonlight itself, falling on her fine, weary profile, showed a wisp or two of hair escaping down her cheek, a relic of her wild ride with the Chouan. But he knew that she slept only in snatches, and that she was concerned for him. Every time that she stirred and turned her head in his direction he deceitfully closed his eyes to delude her into the belief that he was not awake. At her feet lay her brother, wrapped in his cloak; he at least seemed to be enjoying a motionless repose, and evidences of an acoustic kind went to prove that Grain d'Orge, self-banished, out of respect, to the other end of the hall, was certainly not suffering from insomnia.

La Vireville was indeed not without occupation of

a sort as he lay there wakeful and the hours went by. He was enabled to devote almost unlimited time to an interesting problem—one now, unfortunately, impossible of exact solution. Would Mme. de Guéfontaine, this modern Jael, really have stabbed him yesterday morning if he had not forestalled her? On the whole, he was almost inclined to think that she would. But probably she would not have done it very well. . . . What irony, though, if she had—if he, Augustin, after all his hazards and escapes, had ended that way, slain in his sleep by a devoted adherent of the same cause, for a private offence that he had never committed, and which the real offender had since, perhaps, almost expiated! (By the way, he must remember to tell Mme. de Guéfontaine of that.)

At any rate, he was heartily glad to know that she had not, after all, betrayed him. To the conception of her now gradually forming in his mind, such a course seemed so foreign as almost to be incredible. But he did believe that she might have used the knife.

Speculations of this kind did not, of course, advance sleep, though they kept him a little from thinking of his injured foot, which was the real obstacle to slumber. As the moon-pools ebbed away and the place became full of a ghostly grey radiance that might or might not be the dawn—for La Vireville had small idea of the time—he changed his position on the settle, thinking it might ease his foot. Stealthily as he did it, he heard Mme. de Guéfontaine stir. He repeated his expedient of shutting his eyes and lying very still. But he knew in a moment that she had risen from her chair and was bending over him, so he reopened them.

"M. le Chevalier, you cannot sleep, I know," she whispered.

"Peu importe, Madame," he replied. "But what of you?"

"If I could see you sleeping perhaps I could do the same," was her retort. "Let me renew the wet cloth round your foot; it is time it was done."

La Vireville protested, but she paid no heed. Flitting about noiselessly in that pale gloom she procured water, and, kneeling by the settle, very intently unwound the heated wrappings, dipped them in the cool liquid, and replaced them.

"Is that better?" she asked, coming like a ghost to his side.

"Much better!" he murmured. "Almost worth having it crushed for, in fact."

Mme. de Guéfontaine looked down at him without speaking, but he was aware, almost painfully aware, of the distress and remorse surging in her heart.

"I was sure that the Blues had got you—if they had not killed you," she said in a vibrating voice. "And all for me, for me who . . ."

"As far as I can tell," interrupted La Vireville lightly, "they rode over me and never saw me. I assure you that I have the devil's own luck, Madame; it is mixed with a good deal of an inferior kind, but it has always held to this point, that I have so far succeeded in cheating l'Ankou, as we call him in Brittany."

"My brother André had that kind of luck too," said she sadly. "But it failed him in the end."

La Vireville perceived that she wanted to talk about him—perhaps as a kind of amende honorable for her suspicions and hostility at Porhoët. "If you cannot sleep, Madame," he suggested, "will you not tell me about your brother? You see, I only knew of him as 'Alexis,' and I must tell you that I had got it into my head that his real name was de Kérouan or something of the sort."

"At what cross purposes were we playing!" she exclaimed. "Do you really wish me to tell you about André?"

"If you will be so good," replied Fortuné "Con-

sider also, if you please, Madame, that I have procured you a chair here."

She smiled a little, and, bringing one quietly to the side of the settle, sat down, and began in her low and beautiful voice to tell him her history. There was a strange kind of unreal and yet intimate charm in this recital in the morning twilight, that went back now and then to childish days, some of which this old hall itself had witnessed. For here André and Raymonde du Coudrais, from their home in more western Brittany, had been used to visit an old uncle and aunt, and here they and their cousins had played hide-and-seek, and here André himself had lain hid only a week before his death. By reason of its early associations with that beloved brother the old place was now, the narrator confessed, painful to her, yet with a kind of sweetness. But the rest of the Carhoët country, she suddenly acknowledged in a voice that shook, had become intolerable to her.

An extraordinary devotion to her brother André had always been hers from childhood; listening to her, La Vireville thought that so ardent a nature as hers (beating under an exterior that in some ways belied it) must always have needed someone on whom to expend itself, and that having so early found that person, it was singularly fitting that she should never have been forced to transfer her allegiance. For André had never married, and her own marriage, in 1788, to a man many years older than herself, for whom it was evident she had not felt love, but much respect, had left unimpaired the bond between her brother and herself. The Comte de Guéfontaine's death in exile at Hamburg, in 1792, had set her free to serve André and the cause he followed with all her heart and soul. That was the year of the unfortunate Coblentz episode, of which she spoke with far more bitterness than of her brother's death; it was from Coblentz that he had come to her at Hamburg, not yet recovered of the wound to his body, and healed

still less of that to his spirit. At Hamburg they had shared the privations of exile—and worse, the slight sneers of compatriots who looked askance at the Marquis de la Vireville's victim. Their pride at last drove them thence to England. And from England André had found the way to Brittany, the command of the Carhoët division, and his death. His sister had been with him all the time, nineteen months—a long spell of life for a Chouan leader.

And when he had heard the whole tale and realised what a sensitive pride and what a singularly tender affection his cousin's action had outraged, La Vireville was certainly in no mind to rescind his half-jesting condonation of Raymonde de Guéfontaine's attempt at vengeance. Rather, he ratified it.

"Madame," he said when she had ended, "perhaps you can extend some measure of forgiveness to my unhappy cousin when you learn that he gave his life, after all, for the same cause as your brother has done. He died of his wounds after the battle of Charleroi last year."

"But that does not undo what he did," she said quite simply. "It does not give André back his honour; it makes no difference at all."

"No," answered La Vireville, after a pause, "that is true. It does not."

There was a silence. Then she said, leaning forward and looking at him very directly—there was more light now, "M. le Chevalier, I think there are some who love better than they hate, and some who hate better than they love. Could you forgive a mortal injury so readily? . . . But perhaps you have none to forgive?"

La Vireville abruptly put his locked hands over his eyes. "Madame," he replied after a moment, "I have had a mortal injury to forgive these ten years —and I have not forgiven it."

She was startled, no doubt, at the hard intensity

of his tone, and drew back, as one who has stumbled on a grave.

"I beg your pardon," she said in a very low voice. "That was impertinent. I ought not to have asked such a question."

And it was a proof of the measure in which they had both already passed into a region of intimacy sufficiently remote from the somewhat unfortunate circumstances of their first meeting, that it struck neither of them at the moment, least of all the man, that it was a strange question to put to him, considering those circumstances. His recent treatment of an at least attempted mortal injury could hardly be termed rancorous. But this reflection did not occur to Mme. de Guéfontaine till she had, a little later, resumed her efforts at slumber, and to Fortuné it did not occur at all.

(2)

It was something of a surprise to the Chevalier de la Vireville to learn, next morning, how near the manoir of L'Estournel stood to the sea. Henri du Coudrais had, it appeared, made all the necessary arrangements for conveying his sister to Guernsey that evening, and they were to embark, as soon as dusk fell, from a tiny cove not a mile distant from the old house, and, when they had sailed to a certain point, were to be picked up by a fishing smack, and so to St. Peter Port.

But La Vireville himself, as the brother and sister assured him, could lie very conveniently hidden at L'Estournel for another day or two, to permit his foot a further chance of recovery. This, however, was not a course which commended itself to the invalid. He declared that he also should leave that evening for Carhoët, taking the sole means of locomotion open to him, namely, Grain d'Orge's horse, which, having conveyed its double burden safely to the manoir, was

now secretly tethered in one of the tumble-down stalls, nourished on handfuls of grass. If Grain d'Orge could not somehow procure another steed for his own use (which was improbable) he must go on foot, leading this beast, and his master upon it, under cover of night, and by ways known to himself, to Carhoët. Moreover, La Vireville proposed, since the coast was so conveniently near, to accompany Mme. de Guéfontaine and her brother thither, and speed their departure before himself turning inland for his own destination. And in these two resolutions he persisted all day, despite every effort to dissuade him.

But all morning and afternoon he obediently lay, or rather sat propped up, on his settle, his swathed foot extended in front of him, and conversed with the two émigrés, or watched the lady preparing the somewhat exiguous meals necessitated by the absence of fire, which they dared not light for fear of the betraying smoke. During the afternoon they held a solemn conclave, he and she, and she gave him a fresh quantity of valuable information about his new command, of which he took cypher notes.

"How am I going to replace you, Madame?" he said at the end, putting the notes away in his breast, and looking at her with a certain admiration and wonder.

"Shall I come back?" she suggested, smiling. And though he knew that she did not for a moment mean the offer to be accepted, and she had told him that the place, from its memories of the lost André, was hateful to her, he guessed at some lingering traces of regret, even of poignant regret, in her mind.

"You could not take up your quarters at Porhoët again, I fear," said he, smiling too. "I wonder if the Citizen Botidoux has got over his interview with the Commissary! Why did you so providentially keep that tricolour sash in your press, Madame? It is true that I have not felt my own man since I had it round me, but it certainly lent a most con-

vincing—perhaps *the* convincing—touch to the whole affair."

"How amazingly you carried it off!" she exclaimed, her eyes glowing. "Oh, I kept the sash because . . . well, one never knew when it would prove useful—to an émigré embarking, for instance. It came off a dead Blue But, as you can imagine, I could have bitten my tongue out afterwards for having screamed as I did. Yet I—yes, it seemed like a nightmare to recognise your voice. I thought for a moment, you see, that all the time you must have been a Government spy. I could hardly be expected, could I," she inquired, with the glimmer of a smile, "to grasp in a moment such unequalled magnanimity?"

"Madame," said La Vireville hardily, "I am getting somewhat tired of that word. You know, to be quite frank, I have not so much claim to it as you might think. In the first place, I rather admired you for . . . for that business with my hunting-knife—save that if you really want to stab a man you must not hesitate like that about it, and you must know just where to strike (I can show you if you wish); and secondly——"

"Monsieur," said his Jael, looking down and biting her lip, with a heightened colour, "either you are laughing at me, or you are trying to avenge yourself. I think it is true . . . you are not so magnanimous after all."

"Just as I told you!" cried Fortuné. "But I swear that I am not laughing at you. It is the truth, as I live, that when I knew the provocation you had received I thought not less of you, but more, for trying to rid yourself of me—I mean of my cousin Gaspard. But—there is one thing I am dying to know, though I do not feel certain that you can tell me."

She looked warily at his half-mocking expression.

"I suppose, Monsieur Augustin, that you have earned the right to any information I can give you."

La Vireville lazily put his clasped hands behind

his head and kept his eyes on her. "Would you really have inserted that knife into me if I had not . . . waked?"

Mme. de Guéfontaine parried. "I will tell you," she said, no more than a little perturbed, "if you will tell me something. At what moment exactly *did* you wake?"

He held her a second or two under his amused gaze before he would answer. "That, Madame," he said at length, "is too vital a secret to be revealed. I cannot tell you."

"Then I cannot answer your question either," retorted she.

La Vireville made her a bow. "So be it. I shall always cherish the hope that you meant to make a good job of it, like Mlle. de Corday with the late Citizen Marat. Your opportunity, par exemple, was something better. And you, Madame, if it gives you any pleasure, need not know whether I was not awake and watching you all the time." He smiled mischievously. "But let me proceed to the second reason why I am not so magnanimous—what a mouthful of a word it is!—as you think. It is this—that the advent of the patriots of Porhoët followed so soon on your threatening departure that I felt tolerably sure you had not had time, even if you had the will, to summon them. And I remembered that you had warned me of certain suspicious spirits."

This time Mme. de Guéfontaine confessed to emotion, drawing a great breath of relief. "M. le Chevalier, you believe me then—that I did not send for them, that I never should have done!"

"Madame, naturally I believe you. Have you not already told me so? Yet consider—you told me here, after it was all over, while my point is, that the idea had already occurred to me at the time, and that when I had the honour of carrying you off I was pretty sure that you had not, in the event, betrayed me."

She winced at the word, and dropped her head. "I do not know how I could even have threatened it," she said earnestly. "But I was mad."

"You cannot think, Madame," went on La Vireville, the mischief gone out of his face, "how much that thought comforted me. It was difficult for me to connect the idea of you and . . . treachery. The knife—well and good, I could understand that, but not the other."

Mme. de Guéfontaine lifted her head and met his eyes.

"The difficulty is," she said quietly, "to be sure that I have convinced you that I did not betray you even in intention; that when they rushed in, my idea of vengeance was already dead."

"I am content to take your word for that, Madame," said La Vireville, and, bending forward, he lightly took one of her hands and lifted it to his lips.

She flushed and sighed. "It is no use for you to deny it, M. le Chevalier. You are what you refuse to be called."

At that moment Grain d'Orge stumbled past, bearing an armful of herbage for the horse, and casting at the pair as he went, out of his quick little eyes, a glance at once solicitous and discontented. Mme. de Guéfontaine seemed fully conscious of it.

"Poor Grain d'Orge," she said musingly, as soon as he was out of hearing. "He was half beside himself with anxiety about you. I do not know to what saints he did not pray. I am sure he will never be able to pay for all the candles he has promised to St. Yves alone. How was it, Monsieur Augustin, you who repudiate . . . that word . . . that you had never given him even an inkling that I was responsible (as you had every reason to think) for the appearance of the National Guard?"

"Because in that case, Madame," responded La Vireville promptly, "I should never have got him to help me in my little plan. He would never have

gone near the lock-up. He was sufficiently insubordinate as it was. And, as events turned out," he added gravely, "it was a good thing that I never even hinted at it. He would have been quite capable of cutting your throat when he got you alone."

"He did not seem very much pleased with me as it was," remarked Mme. de Guéfontaine pensively. "He accused me of having——" She stopped abruptly.

"He made the same remark to me in the cottage," observed La Vireville gravely, but with laughter in his eyes. "I trust that, like me, you were quick to acknowledge its justice. I told him that you had done it with a—knife."

If he had wished to put an end to their conversation La Vireville certainly succeeded, for at that Mme. de Guéfontaine, murmuring something about Henri and a meal, arose and left him. She had, for the time being, quite lost her beautiful pallor.

(3)

La Vireville had his way in the end, and rode with them at dusk to the sea, and Mme. de Guéfontaine walked beside the grey horse, throwing a glance now and then at the bandaged foot, which his rider could not get into the stirrup.

"It was all my fault," she said, when they had gone a little way, and L'Estournel, place of refuge and memories, was a memory once more.

"Pardon me, Madame," objected La Vireville from above her, "it was not you who dropped a barrel on my toes."

She gave a rather impatient sigh. "Do you always jest about yourself, M. le Chevalier?"

"Madame, what else would you have me to do? Does it not strike you as humorous, you who know the conditions of our warfare in Brittany, that when

fighting begins again I should have, for a time at least, to lead my men over hedges and through the broom in a litter, which is the only method of conveyance that I can think of at the moment ?" He laughed under his breath. "At any rate, my foot is a change of site for an injury. Last time, not so long ago, it was a knock on the head that I acquired."

"And in whose cause, pray, did you receive that ?"

"But in the usual—no, parbleu, when I come to think of it, it was an extra. It was for—a child, a small boy."

"And what, if one may ask, were you doing that you got knocked on the head for a small boy ?"

"I was trying to convey him back to England. He had come to France by—mistake. I had some trouble over it."

"And is he back in England ?"

The rider nodded. "Safely back in Cavendish Square by now, I trust."

"Cavendish Square ?" said she, surprised, for she knew London. "Then he was an English boy ?"

"No, French, the son of a friend of mine, the Marquis de Flavigny, who lives with his Scotch father-in-law there. And I think I may count the child himself as a friend, if it comes to that."

"Ah, it was not for a person unknown, then, that time—or for one who had tried to do you an injury ?"

"What do you mean ?" asked La Vireville. And he added quickly, "Madame, I beseech you never to refer to that episode again, or I——" But here the grey stumbled badly, and he never finished his threat.

"Hold up, Rosinante!" adjured Mme. de Guéfontaine below her breath.

"You learnt this beast's name the other night, I suppose," suggested La Vireville innocently, for he had not clearly heard what name she used.

She looked up at him with dancing eyes which held a suspicion of moisture.

"Did you not recognise the animal the moment you saw it, M. le Chevalier?"

"But I never set eyes on it before in my life," objected he.

"Yet it certainly comes out of the illustrations—by Coypel, if I remember right, they were. But perhaps when you read it in your childhood you had not an illustrated edition?"

"An edition of what?" asked La Vireville, now completely at sea.

"Of an old Spanish book called *The Adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha*," she said, sparkling, having, as was evident, so timed this thrust that their overtaking her brother and Grain d'Orge at that very moment should prevent his answering her.

Since neither of them could assist in getting ready the little sailing-boat, already at her moorings below them, they had, afterwards, a few moments' more converse. La Vireville had dismounted, and now sat upon the short sea turf at the head of the steep little sandy track that plunged down into the cove. For all the circumstances of escape and danger and caution there was a certain feeling of security, almost of holiday. No patrol was out that night, so much had been previously ascertained. The offshore breeze of evening was blowing; although the sun was down there were rosy wisps in the sky, and the tide drew in upon the little sandy beach like a lover.

"Madame," said La Vireville, looking up at her, for she was still standing, "some time hence, when I come to Jersey, I shall make an excuse to visit Guernsey and see if you are tired of domesticity, and ready to undertake the post of agent de la correspondance again."

"So it is not in the Carhoët division," answered she, looking out to sea.

"Would you come to Kerdronan then?"

The breeze had loosened a strand of her hair, and

she put it back before she replied, turning to him with a half-smile, " I am afraid that Grain d'Orge—I should say Sancho Panza—would not approve."

" True," responded La Vireville, but before he had time to suggest a means of getting round this difficulty, Henri du Coudrais appeared up the sandy path.

" Come, Raymonde," he said, " we should be off." To M. de la Vireville he had already made his grateful adieux, and seeing that gentleman's evident desire to escape any further testimonies of gratitude he did not repeat them now.

But for her leave-taking Raymonde de Guéfontaine waited till her brother had run down the slope once more.

" I forbid you to stand up ! " she said to the Chouan, and, slipping to her knees beside him, she held out her hand. When, however, he thought to carry it to his lips, she seized his right hand strongly in both of hers and pressed her own lips upon it. " I wish André had known you ! " she murmured, with something that sounded like a sob. Then she got up and ran down the sandy path.

And the Chevalier de la Vireville was left in some stupefaction, staring after her and then at his just-saluted hand. . . . After a moment he got to his knees and made a grab for the trailing bridle of his horse, now deriving a hasty nourishment from the coarse grass, intending by this means to support himself on one foot. In clutching at the reins—the grey naturally moving on precisely at the moment of capture—his hand, that hand which had recently been so unexpectedly hallowed, came into contact with something prickly. It was a young plant of sea-holly.

" Peste ! " ejaculated the sufferer, but he caught the bridle and scrambled to his feet—or foot. Once again he looked curiously at his right hand. But the tingling sensation which was running over it now was not due entirely to its contact with a woman's lips. There was a little blood on it, for the sharp,

bloomless sea-holly had scratched him. Blood on his hand and a kiss ; the sea-holly's wound and a woman kneeling beside him by the sea—these things were all to come back to him afterwards. . . . Now he stood with his arm over the saddle, and watched the embarkation.

"I am glad the witch has gone," observed Grain d'Orge with simple thankfulness as he in his turn came up the slope. "She has caused a great deal of trouble. Are you ready, Monsieur Augustin, to start for Carhoët ?"

Monsieur Augustin came out of his momentary reverie. "Quite ready," he replied. "Turn the animal round. I must mount on the wrong side as before, with your kind assistance. By the way, Grain d'Orge, do you know what this creature's name is ?"

He was in the saddle before the Breton, with a grunt, replied in a conclusive tone that it had no name.

"There you are wrong, mon gars," retorted his leader, settling his damaged foot as comfortably as he could. "Very wrong. We all have names—you included. Heigh-ho . . . and so this interlude comes to an end ! Let us hope that we shall succeed in getting to Carhoët this time."

He gathered up the reins, and, with the old Chouan at the horse's head, set his face inland. Not very far out from shore, in the dwindling light, a little sail was bobbing to the waves.

CHAPTER XXI

How Anne-Hilarion fed the Ducks

(1)

It may be judged whether Anne-Hilarion kept silence on his adventures, either to his grandfather or to his admiring audience of servants. The chief rôle in his recitals, however, was always assigned to M. le Chevalier, and endless were the tales of his kindness, his cleverness, and his strength. Mr. Elphinstone, though he would not for anything check these outpourings, found means sometimes to avoid them by diverting his grandson's attention to other subjects, partly because he did not think it good for the child to dwell too much on his recent past, partly because he himself found them so painful. He had latterly lived through a time that he could never forget, nor would he ever be able to forgive himself for letting Anne go to Canterbury. But he would not now, thank God, have to greet his son-in-law, on his return from Verona, with the terrible news of Anne's disappearance.

As it happened it was Anne himself who conveyed to his father the first intimation of what had happened during his absence.

The Marquis arrived unexpectedly one afternoon when Mr. Elphinstone was closeted with his lawyer in the library. Nothing, therefore, passed between them, for the moment, beyond the usual very cordial greetings, and de Flavigny had the fancy to surprise his son unannounced. He went up to the nursery, and, opening the door noiselessly, became a surprised

witness of Anne's powers of narration. Baptiste was sitting rapt upon a stool, and Anne, perched upon a window seat, was describing the midnight flight from Abbeville. To his father, of course, this was merely an exercise in fiction.

"And then we came to water and ships, and M. le Chevalier said I must be his nephew, and we would go in one of the ships, and the captain said Yes, though at first I think he said No, and he gave me that shell I have downstairs, and after quite a long time we came to—where did I tell you yesterday, Baptiste, that we came to?"

"It would be Caen, I think, M. le Comte," replied the ancient retainer, devouring the small narrator with his doglike gaze.

("What game is this they are playing?" thought the unseen listener.)

"Yes, that was the name. I liked Caen; it is a fine town, with many churches. But you know, Baptiste, I think the country of France round that place, Abbeville, not so pretty as England."

"And pray what do you know of Abbeville, little romancer?" interrupted his father, coming forward. "Or, for that matter, of any part of France?"

"M. le Marquis!" exclaimed Baptiste, jumping up from his stool.

"Papa!" screamed Anne-Hilarion, and was off the seat like a flash and had flung himself at him.

But, embraces over, and Baptiste discreetly vanished, de Flavigny repeated his question. "What do you know of France, baby?"

"But—a great deal!" responded Anne-Hilarion with dignity. "I have just been there—did Grandpapa not tell you? I went from the house of the little old ladies at Canterbury; a horrid man took me away in the middle of the night, but M. le Chevalier de la Vireville came after me, and he—well, I do not know what he did to that man, but we went away in the middle of the night again from Abbeville, and were

in a ship, and a postchaise, and a small boat, and it was very cold, and a shot hit M. le Chevalier on the head, and we hid in a cave, and then we were in a forest in Brittany—there they wear such strange clothes, Papa—and then in another ship, and at Jersey, and after that——"

"Good God!" exclaimed the Marquis, rather pale. And he sat down in a chair with the traveller still in his arms. "Now tell me everything from the beginning, Anne, and not so fast. . . ."

M. de Flavigny heard it all again that evening from a narrator much more moved than the first had been—principal actor though that narrator was as well. Mr. Elphinstone was indeed so overcome with self-condemnation for having allowed himself to be duped, and the child to depart, that it was his son-in-law who had to comfort him. In the end the old gentleman registered a firm vow never to take any more French lads into his household from motives of charity.

"But I felt so sure that I had heard you mention the name of de Chaulnes, René," he said in justification. "And she seemed, that old she-devil, really to have known your family. For you say that the incident of your being lost in a quarry as a boy is true?"

His son-in-law nodded thoughtfully. "She must have got hold of it somehow—though one would have thought that some fictitious adventure of my youth would have served as well. But I never remember to have heard my parents mention the name."

"M. de la Vireville implied that it was not their own," murmured the old man.

"I think he knows more about them than I do," said René.

"They were gone, at any rate, by the time I got a warrant out against them, as he prophesied in his letter that they would be."

"You have heard from him then!" ejaculated the

Marquis. "Where is he, sir? Have I no chance of thanking him in person?"

"I am afraid not," said Mr. Elphinstone. "I would give a thousand pounds to do it. But, after all, what are thanks?"

"All that Fortuné would accept," said the Marquis quickly. "On my soul, I don't know which has moved me more, Anne's danger or *his* courage, address, and uncalled-for devotion. . . . But where is he, and what of this letter?"

"I believe," said Mr. Elphinstone, taking a paper from his desk, "that he is either in Jersey or back among his Chouans in Brittany. The letter, such as it is, he sent by Mr. Tollemache."

"'I herewith return to you, sir,'" read René de Flavigny, "'my charming travelling-companion, by the hand of a young man who is, I suspect, as unused to acting the nursemaid as I was myself a few days ago. I fear that Anne's apparel is not as Mme. Saunders would wish to find it, but there was not time for my mother completely to repair it, as I could see that she was aching to do. I think that the child is mercifully none the worse for his experiences, and I, for my part, am eternally your debtor for allowing me to go after him.

"'I return also, by the kindness of the same gentleman, the residue of the sum which you entrusted to me for my mission—not so large a balance as I could wish, but it was not possible to conduct our tour on less expensive lines.

"'Tell René, when he returns, that I hope to meet him, at no distant date, with a contingent of the persons whose appearance and attire has, I believe, made a deep impression upon Anne.

"'I wager that you have already found the nest at Canterbury empty.—Believe me, sir, yours—and particularly Anne's—always to command.

"'C. M. Th. F. DE LA VIREVILLE.'"

"I shall meet him, as he says," said René de Flavigny, laying down the letter, "in France, when the sword is drawn. I went to see Mr. Windham directly I got back to London this morning. Preparations for the expedition are already advancing, and it will start in a few weeks' time."

Mr. Elphinstone looked at the enthusiasm in his face. Once again, then, that fatal shore was going to take a member of his family from him. And would it, this time, yield up its prey?

"You are going to enlist in it, I suppose?" he said sadly.

"I have already done so," replied the young man, his eyes shining. "At least, I have this morning given in my name to the Comte de Puisaye as a volunteer."

(2)

A few days after his father's return from a mission which did not seem to have had any very tangible results, Anne-Hilarion, following the example of his grandfather, definitely decided to write his memoirs—a project which had been in his head since his own homecoming. And since Mr. Elphinstone, a good draughtsman, was embellishing his reminiscences with delicate sepia drawings of Indian scenes and monuments, from sketches made on the spot, Anne-Hilarion resolved that his too should have pictures—reconstructed in this case entirely from memory.

There were other difficult points to be settled. As, were these annals to be written in a copy-book or upon loose sheets of paper? The former was finally chosen, owing to the necessity of lines to one whose pen did not always move in a uniform direction. Then, were the records to be couched in French or English? After much thought and discussion the diarist came to the conclusion, probably unique in the history of autobiography, that the portion dealing with his ad-

ventures in France was to be written in the Gallic tongue, his doings in England in the English.

Mr. Elphinstone had done all in his power to encourage his small imitator, and had bought him a box of paints for the purposes of illustration which, in the first onset of delirious joy, had caused the child entirely to forsake, for the time being, the more laborious travail of the pen, and to cover his grandfather's table with drawings of ships of no known rig, and renderings of La Vireville's person which his worst enemy would not have recognised. Mr. Elphinstone's reasons for this course were not far to seek. The dark day of his son-in-law's departure for the shores of France was drawing nearer more quickly than the former had at first anticipated, and the old man hoped that when it had become an accomplished fact, the new occupation would serve in a measure to absorb and distract Anne-Hilarion. He and the Marquis alike had forborne to cast a shadow on the child, so recently restored to them, by telling him how short a time was his with his father. For René de Flavigny was to join his regiment on the twelfth of June, and May was now half over.

And so, as late as June the sixth, a fine warm afternoon, the diarist, who had not yet been told, was walking in St. James's Park with his father, discussing the project which, near though it was to his heart, had not as yet greatly advanced. It was their last walk together, but only one of them guessed that.

They stood a moment by the lake, where, later on, Anne proposed to feed the wildfowl. At present literary cares were too absorbing.

"I wish that M. le Chevalier were here, Papa," he observed. "You see, I cannot remember the days of the month in France."

"Yes," said the Marquis rather absently, "it is a pity he is not here to help you." For of La Vireville, since the day when he and Anne had parted at St. Helier, not a sign.

"And then there is another thing, Papa," resumed Anne. "I cannot remember anything about the time when I was born."

"That is not expected in a memoir, mon enfant," replied his father. "You state the fact, that is all. You know when your birthday comes."

"Yes," assented Anne. "And that part must be in French, because I was born in France. 'Je suis né le 14 juillet 1789, au château de Flavigny.' You will tell me about that, Papa—about the château?"

The young Frenchman did not answer for a moment. In place of the ordered verdure of the London park, the lake, and the wildfowl, there rose before his eyes the pointed roofs over the sea, the fountains, the terraces, and Janet with the sunlight on her hair. . . .

"Yes, I will tell you . . . some day," he said quietly. "Meanwhile you could begin, could you not? with what you remember in England. And for the present, don't you think, Anne, that you would like to feed the ducks?"

Rummaging in a pocket, his small son produced a paper of crumbs, which, even before he could open it, was espied and loudly commented upon by one of the denizens of the lake.

"Oh, there's one coming already!" ejaculated Anne. "Do not be in such a hurry, duck! Papa, I can't get this open. Please!" He tendered the packet to his father.

However, the expectant Muscovy drake at the edge of the water was destined to disappointment, for just as de Flavigny took the little parcel, Anne's attention was diverted to something widely different. He gave a sudden exclamation of pleasure and surprise.

"Papa, there is M. le Lieutenant coming—who brought me home from Jersey, you know!" It was so. Along the path, the sun glinting on his gold lace, accompanied by a fair damsel in cherry-coloured muslin with a white Leghorn bonnet, Mr. Francis

Tollemache of H.M.S. *Pomone* advanced towards the same goal.

"May I speak to him, Papa?" inquired Anne earnestly.

"Do, mon fils, and make me acquainted with him," said the Marquis. "I have much to thank him for."

"Hallo, young 'un!" exclaimed the sailor, as Anne ran towards the pair. He gravely stooped and shook hands. "Where did you spring from? Cecilia, let me present the Comte de Flavigny."

Miss Cecilia, with a smile which was advantageous to her dimples, followed the example of her escort. "I have heard a great deal about you," she said to the little boy.

"You are M. le Lieutenant's sister?" suggested Anne-Hilarion. But Miss Cecilia, with a laugh and a blush, shook her head, and before Mr. Tollemache could define her relationship the Marquis had come up.

"I must introduce myself," he said, with a bow, in English. "I am Anne's father, Mr. Tollemache, and very glad to have this opportunity of thanking you for your care of my boy."

"There is really nothing whatever to thank me for, sir," returned the young man. "Somebody else did the work and I got the credit—that is what it amounts to."

"On the contrary," said René de Flavigny courteously. "I have cause to be deeply grateful to you for your escort and for your interest in the child. I can assure you," he added, with a smile, "that he amply returns the latter. I have learnt much in these last few weeks about life on board a British frigate."

Mr. Tollemache laughed, and looked at his admirer, to whom his betrothed was talking a few paces away.

"You will shortly have the opportunity, I fancy, sir, of making a more personal acquaintance yourself with the frigate in question. I don't know anything exactly official, and perhaps I should not even refer

to the rumour, but I think we shall leave Portsmouth in company very soon."

The Marquis, lowering his tone, so that his son should not hear, asked the sailor a few questions. Meanwhile Anne and Cecilia, laughing together, threw bread liberally upon the waters, and caused a hasty navigation of wildfowl from all parts.

A little more conversation, and Mr. Tollemache and his fair one agreed that they must be going. A dish of tea, it appeared, awaited their drinking at the house of some elderly aunt in St. James's Square, and they dared not be late.

"Good-bye, Anne," said Francis Tollemache. "You and I must be shipmates again some day." And he was, not very wisely, inspired to add, "I will take good care of your father in France."

"What did M. le Lieutenant mean by saying that he would take care of you in France, Papa?" came the inevitable question, as de Flavigny knew it would, directly the pair were out of earshot. "You are not going away *again*, are you?"

Perhaps, after all, this was as good a moment as another for telling the child.

"Yes, my pigeon," he replied, trying to keep the sadness in his heart out of his voice. "Look, you have dropped a large crumb on the path, and that duck wants it."

But Anne had no thought for ducks now. "Are you going soon?" he queried, seizing hold of his father's hand.

"Yes, I am afraid so," said René, gripping his fingers.

"Oh, Papa, why?"

De Flavigny went down on one knee and put an arm round him. A flotilla of disgusted argonauts watched his movements. "Because it is my duty, Anne. You know that the little King is in prison, and that wicked men have taken the throne away

from him. But we owe him allegiance just the same. You remember, when you were at the meeting in April in Grandpapa's dining-room, where you sat on M. de la Vireville's knee, how we talked about an expedition to France? This is the expedition, and I must go with it, to fight for the King—a little boy like you, Anne—and you must let me go." His voice shook a trifle.

The slow tears gathered in Anne-Hilarion's eyes and coursed down his cheeks. Dropping his last bit of bread, he laid his head against his father's breast, as the latter knelt there by the lake. "Je ne peux pas le supporter," he said.

The Marquis thought that they could both bear it better if he carried him home, and did so—at least, to nearly the top of Bond Street.

(3)

"I have had to tell the child," he said to his father-in-law when they got back.

"I thought you had done so," returned the old gentleman with melancholy. "Perhaps it is as well. I have a feeling that you may be summoned even earlier than you think."

He was right. About seven o'clock that evening his son-in-law came to him in the library, an open missive in his hand.

"It is obvious that you possess the gift of second-sight, sir," he said, with a rather forced gaiety. "It has come, as you predicted, earlier than I expected."

"What, the summons already!" exclaimed Mr. Elphinstone, starting from his chair.

René nodded. "I must go immediately—to-night, directly I can get my valise packed. It is almost in readiness," he added.

"But why so suddenly?"

"I look to you, sir, with your gift of prophecy, to

tell me that," said René, with a smile. "There is no reason given; but I must be at Southampton to-morrow afternoon."

"You will have time for supper?" queried the old man, his hand on the bell-pull.

It was a sad, hurried little meal on which Janet Elphinstone and her deerhound looked down. Neither of the men spoke much, or ate much either. At last the Marquis, looking at his watch, got up.

"If you will excuse me, sir, I will go and say good-bye to Anne now."

At the sound of his carefully-controlled voice Mr. Elphinstone almost broke down. "Oh, René, René, if only you need not!"

Very erect, at the other end of the table, the young man wore a look which was doubtless on the faces of those of his kin who had mounted the guillotine, as they went to death. He had, indeed, for what he was about to do, almost as much need of courage as they.

"God knows," he answered, "that I would give everything in the world not to leave him." He looked up for a moment at the child-portrait on the wall. "I think Jeannette too knows that. He is all I have —except my honour."

"And you must sacrifice him to that?"

"Would you have it the other way round, sir?"

"No—no! I don't think so . . ." gulped the old man. "Go, then. . . ."

But as the door shut behind his son-in-law he sank back in his chair and put his hand over his eyes. First Janet, then Anne-Hilarion, then René—France had taken them all, and only the child had been given back. René, he felt sure, would never return.

The night-light was already burning, though there was yet daylight in the room, when the Marquis came in to take farewell of all he loved best on earth. He drew back the gay chintz curtains and stood looking down on the treasure above all treasures which

Jeannette had committed to him, and which now he was going to forsake. For, like his father-in-law, he felt that he should not return.

Anne-Hilarion was sound asleep, one flushed cheek on his hand, after his custom, his hair tumbled, and his lips parted in the utter abandonment of childish slumber. What a pity to wake him! De Flavigny all but yielded to the impulse just to kiss him and to steal quietly out of the room. But he knew that the boy would fret afterwards if he went away without farewell. So with a heavy heart he stooped over him and spoke his name.

"Is it you, M. le Chevalier?" murmured Anne sleepily. "Oh, I was dreaming that I was in France. . . . What is it, Papa?"

"Shall I take a message from you to the Chevalier?" suggested René, catching at this opening and trying to smile.

Anne was still only partially awake. "Yes," he said drowsily. "Tell him that I want to show him my new goldfish . . . and tell him to come back soon to England. . . ." The words began to tail off into sleep again. So much the better. The Marquis knelt down and gave him a long kiss.

"Good-bye, my darling, my darling!" he whispered.

And instantly Anne was fully aroused. "Papa! you are not going *now*—to-night?"

"Yes," said his father. "I start for Southampton to-night. Kiss me, my son, and be a good boy while I am away—and a brave one now!"

But really it was he—as he felt—who had need of courage then, for next moment, releasing his hold of the child, as he knelt there, he himself had buried his face in the coverlet.

BOOK THREE

THE ROAD THAT FEW RETURNED ON

"It was mirk, mirk night, there was nae starlight,
They waded through red blude to the knee;
For a' the blude that's shed on the earth
Rins thro' the springs o' that countrie."

THOMAS THE RHYMER.

CHAPTER XXII

"To Noroway, To Noroway"

(1)

From the quarterdeck of His Britannic Majesty's frigate *Pomone*, which had recently come to anchor in the wide and placid bay of Quiberon, Mr. Francis Tollemache gazed with interest on that portion of the southern coast of Brittany which lay before him. The June evening was calm and foggy, but not sufficiently so as to obscure the nearer land. In front of the observer was the low, sandy shore of Carnac; to the right the deeply indented coast, scarcely seen, broke into inlets and islands till, passing the narrow mouth of that surprising inland sea, the Morbihan, which gave its name to the department, it swept round into the peninsula of Rhuis. But on Mr. Tollemache's left hand, much nearer, curved the long, thin, sickle-blade of the peninsula of Quiberon, with its tiny villages, its meagre stone-walled fields, and its abundant windmills. About two-thirds of the way up, at the narrowest part of the blade, the threatening mass of Fort Penthièvre looked out on the one side over the tranquil waters of the bay, on the other over the tormented open sea, the 'mer sauvage,' that broke against the very rocks on which the fortress was built. And to this long natural breakwater was due the shelter of that ample beach at Carnac, indeed the spacious harbourage of the bay itself, where now the present squadron and its transports rode in comfort this twenty-fifth of June.

For the long-talked-of Government expedition had really sailed, and the surmise made by Mr. Tollemache to the Marquis de Flavigny that afternoon in St. James's Park had proved entirely correct. Not only did his ship, the *Pomone*, form part of the convoying force, but she flew the flag of the commodore himself, that sterling sailor and gentleman, Sir John Borlase Warren. Under his command there had left Southampton on the sixteenth of the month a squadron comprising two seventy-fours, the *Thunderer* and the *Robust*, and seven vessels of lesser armament, which flotilla had the task of convoying transports containing three thousand five hundred French Royalists, all kinds of stores and uniforms, muskets to the number of twenty-seven thousand, and ammunition to match. And it was in vain that the Brest fleet, under Villaret-Joyeuse, had tried to cut them off from the coast of France.

As Mr. Tollemache, his telescope under his arm, thus gazed at their destination—for he understood that the landing, which the British would cover, but in which they would not participate, was to take place on the easy sands of Carnac—it occurred to him, tolerably free though he was from the curse of imagination, that the unfortunate devils of Frenchies whom they were convoying must feel rather queerish at seeing their native shores again. They were in fact crowded now on the decks of the transports, gazing at the coast through the mist and the failing daylight. M. de Flavigny, for instance, that little boy's father, he was probably there, doing the same, poor beggar . . . just like the two leaders of the expedition here on the quarterdeck of the flagship. Out of the corner of his eye the young lieutenant could see them, talking to the commodore; the strutting, self-important, irascible little man in the uniform of the troops in English pay, the Comte d'Hervilly, and the would-be organiser of the Chouannerie, the Comte de Puisaye, tall, awkward, and enigmatic. From what Francis

Tollemache had seen of these individuals during the voyage he had not formed a very high opinion of their capacity. There did not seem to be much harmony between them either, and their authority was strangely divided, for d'Hervilly, who held an English commission, was supposed to be in command when the troops were at sea, and Puisaye when they were landed. For this extraordinary arrangement Mr. Tollemache had heard that My Lords of the Admiralty were to blame, and he thought the plan very foolish.

He was to be confirmed in this opinion. That night it fell to him, as officer of the watch, to witness the arrival up the side of the *Pomone*, from a tiny boat, of two Chouan chiefs, the Chevalier de Tinténiac and the Comte du Boisberthelot, gentlemen of title arrayed in dirty Breton costumes. As a matter of fact the young man had seen them before, for they had boarded the frigate at Southampton before she sailed, but he hardly recognised them now. They brought, so he later understood, good accounts of the disposition of the countryside, where all the peasantry were ready to rise, undertook to 'sweep' the coast, and strongly pressed an immediate disembarkation. And immediately the fruits of the divided command were made manifest: the Comte de Puisaye and Sir John Warren were for following this advice, but, since d'Hervilly objected, they had to give way to the needless precaution of a reconnaissance, on which he insisted. So next morning, at daybreak, the young sailor saw him embark in a cutter and make a majestic tour of the bay—a proceeding which had no effect save that of delaying the landing for twenty-four hours.

"And," as Mr. Tollemache observed later in the wardroom to a friend, "why give the beggars on shore longer warning of our arrival than we need? They are not blind, I suppose; this little collection can hardly be invisible to the crew in the fort over there, for instance! Land 'em at once, say I!"

The friend drew at his pipe. "Wish we were landing a party too, eh, Tollemache?"

"Well, *we* aren't getting any fun for our money! I confess I would rather like to have a smack at the sans-culottes before we leave. Do you think the fellows we are landing have much of a chance, Carleton?"

"Devilish little, I should say," replied his laconic companion, and knocked out his pipe.

(2)

"Surely it must be a good omen!" thought René de Flavigny that night, where he sat, with the other officers of the regiment to which he was attached—du Dresnay's—in the flat-bottomed boat approaching Carnac beach. For everything to-night—or rather, this morning, since it was two o'clock—was made resplendent by the glorious moon which seemed to be riding the heavens on purpose to welcome these exiles in arms to the land of their birth. Behind the steadily advancing boats the hulls of the English squadron lay almost motionless on the breast of an unrippled sea of argent, in front the wide, pale sands of Carnac stretched like a magic band of silver. Yes, surely it was a good omen!

Oh, if only some day his little son too could come back to the land of his fathers, in no hostile or furtive fashion, but openly, as of right—and if he might be with him too! Or might his own death avail, if need were, to bring Anne there before he grew old! Such was René de Flavigny's prayer in that speaking radiance. And the sight of that shore and the beauty of the night itself made him think also, If only one were not coming with a sword against one's mother! There stole back to him too the remembrance of the day when he had pointed out the oncoming shores of France to Jeannette—a bride—and then of the day

when they had left them behind in their flight—the last time she was ever to see them. Yes, when last he had looked on France she had been in his arms, and Anne in hers. . . .

De Flavigny's meditations were suddenly checked. Orders were being shouted; the boats came to a standstill on the silver tide. And, peering forward, René could make out the cause.

Drawn up on the beach in the moonlight was a small body of Republican troops. Their white breeches and facings and cross-belts were clearly visible. Between the shore and the now stationary craft with their load were slipping the flotilla's half-dozen gunboats.

"Oh, why are we not there!" sighed a young officer sitting by the Marquis, bringing his hand sharply down on his knee.

But before the English sailors could fire a shot the Blues began to draw off in haste, and from the mainland behind them came the rattle of musketry. The Chouans there were evidently driving out the small Republican garrisons before them—sweeping the coast, in short, as they had undertaken.

"First blood to the Bretons!" said the young officer, with envy in his tones. René felt some consolation in reflecting that La Vireville had probably had a share in that honour.

He began to talk to his companion as the boats resumed their shoreward course. There was time enough indeed for any amount of conversation before either of them set foot on the beach, for the régiment du Dresnay was in the second detachment, and the first had yet to be landed—the regiment of Loyal-Emigrant, mostly veterans from Flanders, and d'Hervilly's own regiment, once Royal-Louis, the numbers of which had been made up, most unwisely, by drafts from the French Republican prisoners in England.

But at last their turn came, and to cries of "Vive le Roi" and the roll of drums du Dresnay's colours were

unfurled, and, when they were near enough, many an émigré jumped into the water and waded to land. In du Dresnay many were actually Bretons, and for them the shore in front of them was not only France, but their own sacred corner of France, and several of them, when they reached it, dropped on their knees and kissed the wet sand.

René de Flavigny did not do that, but it was not for want of emotion, for his heart was swelling painfully as he stood at last on the earth that had borne him. "It is France, France!" he said to himself, hardly believing it. And then he was swallowed up in the intense excitement reigning on the beach, where two or three bands of the victorious Chouans had suddenly streamed down upon the regiments of the first detachment, embracing their compatriots and declaring that the whole countryside was theirs—and filling some of the correctly uniformed newcomers with surprise at their strange appearance. Even their officers were little better clad. De Flavigny's eyes lit upon one of these—a French gentleman from Jersey—and beheld a figure attired in a little green vest, short breeches of the same, with bare legs covered with mud, burst shoes, a three months' beard, and a perfect armoury of weapons. But where was Fortuné? Had he been delayed, or met with some mishap?

And the scene became still more confused and further charged with emotions, for there were now arriving not Chouans, but the peaceful inhabitants of the districts round, bringing cattle, and carts loaded with provisions, and all eager to help disembark the ammunition and the cannon, and insisting on carrying through the water, on their shoulders, those émigrés who had not yet reached shore. The noise and tumult were indescribable, and at last, to complete the reception, there advanced on to the beach, singing as they came, a procession of priests preceded by crosses and the banners of their parishes.

It was at these last that the Marquis was gazing,

wondering for the first time why the saintly old Bishop of Dol, Monseigneur de Hercé, whom they had brought with them, had not been landed with his ecclesiastics, when a hand fell on his shoulder, and he found himself looking into the face of La Vireville, bronzed and not overclean, his hair falling loose on his shoulders in the Breton manner—differentiated indeed from his men only by his high boots and the white scarf that crossed his breast.

De Flavigny seized him by the wrists. "At last, at last, I am able to thank you, Fortuné!"

But the Chouan wrenched a hand free and put it over the Marquis's mouth.

"Don't speak of that now, as you love me, René! It is past history, and we have more important matters to occupy us. And as for thanks, it is I who owe them to you, as responsible for the child's existence. . . . Is he well?"

If the young man was not allowed to speak his thanks, he could look them, there on the sandy beach amid the excited throng, the east on fire with the coming day, and his friend's hand in his. "I was to tell you, if I had the chance to meet you, that he had got a new goldfish in place of the one he left at Canterbury, and that he hopes to show it to you—some day."

La Vireville smiled. "He shall bring it to France."

"And show it to the little King at Versailles," interposed de Flavigny, "when we have put him into his own again!"

All the amusement died out of the Chouan's face. "You have not heard then?"

"What!" asked René in alarm.

La Vireville took off his shabby, wide-brimmed hat. "Louis XVII. is dead . . . he died before you sailed, on the eighth of June. I have not long known it—my men do not know it yet. The Comte de Provence will have to be proclaimed here. The Bretons, who know nothing of him, will probably murmur. That

poor child was often spoken of amongst them, whereas the Regent—Bon Dieu, what is happening!"

They both turned. At a little distance, where the new muskets were being distributed to the Chouans, a sergeant of d'Hervilly's regiment was having an argument of more than words with two or three Bretons who had evidently precipitated themselves on to these new possessions more quickly than he liked. Into the disturbance there now entered a Chouan of Herculean proportions, presumably a leader, who, seconded in his efforts by a young man of twenty with the face of a girl, began driving off the excited gars with the butt-end of a musket.

"That is Georges Cadoudal and his friend Mercier la Vendée," observed La Vireville. "Those must be his own Morbihannais that he is disciplining!"

He looked on rather amused, but suddenly his face clouded. The Comte d'Hervilly had unfortunately hurried to the scene, and began to rate the two Chouan leaders in no measured terms. The gigantic Cadoudal —brutal, adored, and bravest of the brave—restrained himself with evident difficulty, and finally went off, the little figure of d'Hervilly following him with gesticulations. Meanwhile, amid shouts of laughter, the sergeant and the too impetuous Bretons were suddenly reconciled.

La Vireville shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot congratulate you, René, on your leaders! That man d'Hervilly is incompetent and ridiculous; Heaven send he do not make a mess of everything! And as for Puisaye, who fancies himself the man to stand in La Rouërie's shoes and to head the Chouannerie —I know something of him and of his intrigues in Jersey. Well, I must be getting back to my men over there, lest Grain d'Orge is letting them also acquire firearms too quickly. Au revoir, my friend; I trust not to be away more than a few days."

"You are going then—but where?"

"I am going to help Tinténiac and du Boisberthelot

drive the Blues out of Auray and Landévant. When I return I hope to see the fleur-de-lys on Fort Penthièvre over there Au revoir ! "

He wrung the Marquis's hand and departed, and René watched his tall figure making its way through the scarlet-clad ranks of émigrés (whose uniforms seemed to many of them to smack too much of English patronage) ere he himself turned away.

CHAPTER XXIII

DISPLEASURE OF "MONSIEUR AUGUSTIN"

IN a little wood to the south of Auray, and in an exceedingly bad temper, the Chevalier de la Vireville sat on a fallen tree and surveyed his small band of Chouans, who, lying, seated or crouched round him on their heels, looked at him with the expression of dogs who know that they deserve a beating—though wearing, indeed, the appearance of dogs who have already received one.

It was the evening of the third of July, six days after the landing at Carnac. During those days Auray and Landévant had already been taken by the Chouans and abandoned again for lack of support. Last night had come peremptory orders from Carnac that they were to be retaken; so the Comte du Boisberthelot and La Vireville had set out at eleven that morning, without a single piece of artillery, to recapture Auray, which was garrisoned by a thousand men under the Republican adjutant-general Mermet. At the same time Tinténiac, although he knew the task to be impossible, had attacked Landévant.

Mermet's sentries were not on the alert, and so the Comte du Boisberthelot, who was a sailor, came charging in at the head of his men by the route de l'Eglise, and drove out the Republicans. But outside the town was Hoche himself, who ordered them to retake it at any price. Mermet, in obeying this order, fell into the neat ambush which La Vireville had prepared for him in a copse by the Faubourg St. Goustan, and his column was on the point of breaking up in

disorder when Hoche came quickly up with his grenadiers and two pieces of artillery. To stop his advance—a hopeless attempt it was—La Vireville transferred himself and his Bretons to the bridge into the town, cast up a barricade with carts and casks and beams, and could probably have held this obstacle for a long time against hand-to-hand fighting, or if he had possessed the smallest piece of artillery. It was the want of that which had caused him to grind his teeth as his men fired and reloaded and fired behind the rapidly vanishing barricade, their own numbers dwindling in proportion. For it was Hoche who had the cannon.

So he and his Chouans were driven from their position, and, penned into the square by the church, were mown down by grapeshot till he got them out of the town, when, in order to cover the wounded du Boisberthelot's retreat to Locmaria, they returned to the guerrilla fighting to which they were most accustomed, lying hidden in the broom and picking off their men with the skill of poachers. Unfortunately the Republican artillery discovered them there also. . . . Nothing that La Vireville could say or do would stop them this time; their abandonment of the position became a rout, whose track was strewn with discarded sabots and knapsacks and even with muskets. The émigré himself, swearing and furious, was swept away on the flood, and finally, at dusk, fugitives and leader found themselves in this little wood, not much more than a coppice, but safe enough from pursuit, where the former had time to draw breath and to reflect, and the latter to get rid of some of the bitter anger and disgust which had prompted him, at first, to leave them to their own devices and return alone to sell his life at Auray.

He took another look round his dejected followers, and propped his head between his fists, his elbows on his knees, to think. He knew that he could get these fierce and childlike natures in hand again—that,

ashamed and penitent, they were, in fact, already in the desired condition. He had no right, after all, to be hard on them for the shortcomings of others. It was not their fault that they had no artillery, and that help had not been sent from the émigré regiments at Carnac. Moreover, his men had done no worse than the rest, for a rumour was already afoot that Tinténiac, the reckless and irresistible, had been beaten back from Landévant, and that Vauban with his supporting force of Chouans had fared no better.

Seeing his chief's attitude, Grain d'Orge, looking more than ever ruffianly by reason of the filthy rag round his head, rose from the ground and softly approached him.

"Monsieur Augustin is not wounded?"

"Si," retorted La Vireville without moving. "In my pride."

An uncomfortable silence. Grain d'Orge rubbed his bristly chin.

"If only the general had helped us a little," he grumbled. "If some of those fine uniforms we saw at Carnac——"

"If only we had had a gun——" said another.

"Perhaps if we had prayed more to Ste. Anne," suggested a third, thinking of the famous shrine of that saint so dear to all Bretons, just outside Auray.

La Vireville heard the last remark. He lifted his head.

"On the contrary," he observed bitingly, "I should recommend a little less rosary and a little more attention to simple military duties. Where is the sentry I posted by that hedge a short time ago?—Tudieu, this is a shooting matter!"

Springing to his feet, he went over to the hedge in question, where indeed no sentry was visible. But he was there for all that . . . only the shooting seemed to have been done already.

"He was hit at the barricade," said the croaking

voice of Grain d'Orge in La Vireville's ear as he stooped over the prostrate man.

"Then why the devil didn't he say so!" retorted his leader. "Give me a hand, someone, and let us find out what is the matter with him. Ah, I see; fortunately nothing very serious."

And having duly played the part of surgeon—a part to which he was not unaccustomed—set another man at the fallen sentry's post, and made some further dispositions, La Vireville stood a moment looking through the tree-trunks towards Carnac, a little south of the dying sunset, wondering what was happening in the peninsula of Quiberon.

"And what shall we do next, Monsieur Augustin?" asked a voice rather timidly, the voice of Le Goffic.

La Vireville turned round. "I suppose, my children," he said, more kindly, "that unless M. d'Allègre holds Locmaria we shall have to go back to Carnac and tell the general that we have not been able to do what we were told to do. For the present, we will wait here till morning."

"If Monsieur Augustin would sleep a little . . .?" One or two of them had spread an old cloak under a tree, and now with gestures invited him to repose. They were like children; it was impossible to be long angry with them. So he went and lay down on the cloak, to find that in spite of disgust and anxiety he was ready to sleep. His new sentinel by the hedge, his musket leaning against him, was telling his beads, and all his men, directly he lay down, lowered their voices. He was drowsy, and floated away on a half-dream to Jersey. . . . Why on earth were they talking of Anne-Hilarion?

"The little one, thou seest, when he was with us at Kerdronan, how he was like the little Jesus Himself!"

"Yes, one looked to see His Mother round every corner."

"And as for him," said the first speaker, indicating

15940
LIBRARY

his recumbent leader, "he might have been St. Joseph!" But at this comparison La Vireville was shaken with irreverent mirth

He began to be more drowsy. Grain d'Orge was saying something about Carhoët—he could not catch what. But the mention of the name brought back the swarm of little memories that clung round it, that had had their birth in so small a space of hours. His foot was healed, the business of leader of that division passed on, at his request, to someone else, but he had not forgotten Mme. de Guéfontaine. On the contrary, he had found himself often thinking of her during the few weeks that had elapsed since she had made her somewhat sensational entry into his experience. He was aware now of the sleepy conviction that she ought to have had some part in this adventure—not indeed in the present sorry episode of defeat, but in the landing the other night under the moon. Or she might have stood, at daybreak, holding aloft the banner with the lilies on the prow of one of those incoming boats. . . . She would, surely, have been in her element. . . .

Then, with the rattle of beads and the murmur of the Ave Maria in his ears, La Vireville went off into slumber, and dreamt that Mr. Tollemache, whom he believed to be in the English flotilla, was telling Mr. Elphinstone (the latter in a cocked hat and epaulettes) by the barricade at Auray, that it had been arranged for the English soldiers to land, and the Frenchmen to man the English ships. But, Anne-Hilarion appearing suddenly in a boat, and signifying that he wished to have Grain d'Orge for a nurse instead of Elspeth, the conversation became entirely occupied with this startling proposal—which did not, however, strike La Vireville in his dream as being anything out of the common.

CHAPTER XXIV

Creeping Fate

(1)

"Mon cher beaupère," wrote the Marquis de Flavigny, "my former letter (if you ever get it, which I should think doubtful) will have told you of the incidents of our landing at Carnac. I have now to inform you that we are in complete possession of the peninsula of Quiberon, the fort which commands it having surrendered, on being summoned, three days ago. In consequence all the émigré regiments have left their temporary quarters on the mainland, round Carnac, and are bivouacked in the peninsula itself. I myself write actually in Fort Penthièvre, and at this very moment I hear the sound of pick and spade, for the engineers, who have hopes, they say, of making it into another Gibraltar, are hard at work this morning throwing up fresh entrenchments."

The young man broke off, and looked down from the embrasure of the surrendered fort, where he was sitting, at the work to which he had just referred. For three days, as he had said, the fleur-de-lys had floated over Fort Penthièvre, having been hoisted there, in fact, on the very day of the failure of the Chouan attack on Auray. What wonder if the enheartened Royalists had toasted the future that night, in the poor little villages scattered among the stone-encircled fields, or that they saw in a bright vision not only the restored splendours of Versailles

—the triumph of a cause—but the tourelles of the château or the little manoir, long in alien hands, which they had left for poverty and exile . . . recovered homes where now, after all, their children and their children's children might play.

But to-day the white and gold standard hung in heavy, listless folds from the flagstaff, for it was a hot, close morning, of the kind that saps the energies and is tinged besides with a suggestion of unpleasant auguries, the sensation of waiting for something to happen, one knows not what. . . . A scarcely visible sun sent down a surprising heat, and haze lay over the sea on either side. Even the throb of the Atlantic sounded sullen and remote, for all its nearness.

René de Flavigny, who was sensible to atmospheric conditions, felt a fresh welling up within him of a vague uneasiness that had been his all morning, an uneasiness which the two or three other little groups of officers, mostly engineers, on the platform of the fort did not appear to be sharing. Instead of going on with his letter to his father-in-law he allowed himself to wander off into speculations and apprehensions which could scarcely with prudence have been committed to paper. He thought bitterly, regretfully, of the insane jealousies and incompetence of the Comtes de Puisaye and d'Hervilly, which, during the past days of inaction, had been growing more manifest every hour. And why had there been those days of inaction? Why was he, an officer in an émigré regiment, sitting idly here in safety on the peninsula writing a letter, when they all knew that the Chouans whom they had not been allowed to support had been beaten off from Auray, and were, if reports were to be trusted, faring none too well in other portions of the mainland? What madness possessed the generals to keep them, regiments in the main of trained men, doing nothing, while the irregular peasant levies were pitted against the now reinforced Republican garrisons of the interior? It was surely

all too probable that these, gathering in force, would utterly crush the brave but undisciplined guerrilla troops. In that case, what of Fortuné de la Vireville, who had gone off so gaily with his Bretons ten days ago?

The Marquis got up from the embrasure, and, despite the heat, began to pace up and down. Surely the proper course was to push on into the interior, while the dismay which their coming had undoubtedly spread amongst the Blues was still fresh, and before the latter had time to discover that the Royalist invaders were numerically not so strong as they had imagined. Puisaye indeed was credited with the desire for such a course, but, owing to the equivocal instructions of the English Government, his will was not paramount. It was quite true that their present position was strong; this very fortress on whose upper works he now meditated formed an almost impregnable defence to the amazingly narrow entrance of the lower part of the peninsula, and out there, half seen in the haze, was the friendly English squadron to protect them against any attack by sea on their rear. But René and his friends were all impatient to do something more than merely create, in this favourable position, a dépôt for supplies with which to replenish the Royalists of the interior. Why, in God's name, did they not press on, and strike while the iron was hot . . . and why also had they not with them a French prince of the blood? Of what use to say that the Comte d'Artois was following? He was wanted now!

M. de Flavigny tried to put a term to his impatient thoughts, and, sitting down again, attempted to go on with his letter to Mr. Elphinstone, keeping it free of indiscreet criticisms. But his head was too full of these inopportune questionings; they threatened to find an outlet by means of his fingers, and that would never do. So he took a fresh sheet of paper, and began a letter to his son, telling him under what circumstances he had met his friend the Chevalier, how he had even, he believed, set eyes on the famous

Grain d'Orge of whom the child had talked so much, how——

He had got so far when he heard a sudden violent exclamation burst simultaneously from a couple of officers talking near him. Jumping up, he, like them, looked hastily over the nearest parapet.

The sandy waste between the fort and the mainland had miraculously become alive with quickly moving figures, groups of people running towards the fort in the greatest disorder. René could hardly believe his eyes. Children, women, old men, cattle, carts laden with household goods, on they came, a confused horde streaming down the top of the peninsula like affrighted locusts. It was only too clear what had happened—the Chouans, left without support, had been driven from their untenable positions, and were even now falling back on Quiberon, while before them poured the panic-struck inhabitants of the villages round, terrified at the prospect of being left at the mercy of the victorious Blues. As they came nearer, it was obvious that there were flying Chouans also in that advancing flood.

"Good God!" exclaimed the Comte de Contades, Puisaye's chief of staff, hurrying past, "they will take us by assault! There are only fifty men on guard. M. d'Hervilly must be informed at once!"

René watched, horrified and fascinated, from the embrasure. As yet there was no sign of an enemy —only this panting multitude full of one desire, to find safety. And soon some of the younger and more agile fugitives were swarming unchecked over the palisades of the newly erected entrenchments, clambering up the counterscarps of the fort itself. They clung weeping round the legs of the officers whom they encountered, having completely lost their heads; and in the midst of the confusion arrived the Comte d'Hervilly, who seemed as completely to have lost his. At any rate he was in his usual state of ineffective irritation.

"In God's name, get rid of all these people!" de Flavigny heard him cry, striking out right and left. But thousands of terrified fugitives were not so easily to be disposed of, especially when all the passages were blocked up by the carts which they had brought with them. And on d'Hervilly's sending for the régiment du Dresnay to come in haste and turn them out, he learnt that his command could not be at once obeyed, since the regiment was dispersed securing provisions. The mixture of calamity and farce reached its climax when some of the invading fugitives cried out, "There are the Blues!" on which all who possessed muskets instantly fired them off in every direction, to the no small danger of everybody else. In fact, the Comte de Vauban, an officer of high rank, who was at the bottom of the revetments at the moment, had only just time to save himself by throwing himself off his horse.

At last appeared, marching in good order, the Chouans of Tinténiac and Cadoudal, who had not broken, then their rearguard, and finally, a good distance behind, a hundred or so of Republican sharpshooters. A salvo from the fort dispersed these latter, and mingled with its echoes came the sound of the drums of du Dresnay, arriving to bring some order into this scene of confusion. And thus, at last, the crowd of fugitives was expelled, and driven down towards the southern extremity of the peninsula.

During all this affair the Comte de Puisaye sat very composedly at his dinner.

When René de Flavigny was able to get free of the fort, thus carried by its own defenders, he went anxiously in search of his friend among the Chouan troops. He found him, but too busy to do more than exchange a word with him.

"Hoche attacked all along our line with about thirteen thousand men," said La Vireville, wiping the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Ouf, what an infernal day for a retreat! Well, I am afraid we have brought you no welcome present in all these useless mouths!"

"Why, oh why, were we not allowed to come to your support!" cried the Marquis.

La Vireville shrugged his shoulders. "Why indeed! At any rate I see the lilies, as I had hoped, blooming on Fort Penthièvre. Only the gardener, you know, is not far off. . . ."

Indeed, every émigré knew by nightfall that the victorious Republicans had established themselves in the important position of Ste. Barbe, a village which commanded the entry into the peninsula, where they could be seen feverishly working at entrenching themselves. The invaders were in danger of being penned, like trapped creatures, into that tongue of land on which they had attained a foothold.

(2)

The Marquis de Flavigny never sent his unfinished letters to England. If he had completed them they would not have been very pleasant reading. Even the Comte d'Hervilly realised the disastrous consequences of being shut into Quiberon. The night after the influx of the fugitives he attacked the Republicans (who were taken by surprise), pushed his onset up to their very outworks, lost his head, and abandoned the attack, for no apparent reason, just at the very moment of success. *Quem Deus vult perdere* . . .

After that abortive attack on Ste. Barbe things went quickly from bad to worse. The sixth of July had been on all counts an unmitigated disaster; the Chouan defeat did not fail to have a bad moral effect on the Bretons of the interior, and the useless mouths, as La Vireville had only too truly called them, brought the number of souls on the narrow strip of land up to fourteen thousand. It became a difficulty to feed

the refugees; and most of them were not of the slightest military value. Old men, women, and children, they had to subsist as best they were able, shelterless, and cooking what they could get on fires of dung and seaweed. And even the Chouans were sullen and discontented; it was hard to make them work at the entrenchments with any zeal, and if they were reproached with their idleness they invariably replied that they had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. In fact, a small ration of salt meat and biscuit did seem insufficient to a peasant accustomed to more solid nourishment. The Comte de Puisaye, indeed, announced in the order of the day that he wished the brave Chouans, those dauntless supporters of the altar and the throne, to be particularly well treated, but as, this order once promulgated, he took no steps whatever to see that it was carried out, it frequently happened that the supporters of the altar and the throne went very hungry.

The Chouans of the Chevalier de la Vireville's little band, however, never suffered from that particular privation; their leader saw to that. How he managed it, by what system of combined begging, storming, and cajoling, the young Le Goffic knew, but to de Flavigny it was a marvel how he contrived to procure rations for them. The two friends did not very often meet, for though de Flavigny, who was only attached to the régiment du Dresnay, had more leisure than most officers, La Vireville, whose men called for constant attention of a kind that disciplined troops hardly needed, had less. Yet, curiously enough, in those few days of breathing-space, while the Royalists were awaiting the moment for another attempt to free themselves of the snare in which Hoche held them, when the young Republican general indeed was writing, with cruel and justified metaphor, "The enemies are in the rat-trap, and I with divers cats at the door of it,"—in those days, when every man's private affairs had sunk into relative unimportance, de

Flavigny was to learn that concerning his comrade's personal history which, in spite of occasional speculation, he had never really sought to know. He was, in fact, himself an agent in the chance encounter—if there be such a thing—which brought about the disclosure.

It befell as follows: One afternoon, de Flavigny, who was billeted with some other gentlemen of like standing with himself in a cottage in the tiny village of Clouarnet, found himself in his quarters with a couple of these, and, in addition, an officer whom they had brought with them, a M. de St. Four, of the régiment de la marine, usually known, from the name of its colonel, as the régiment d'Hector. M. de St. Four was a person of agreeable address and appearance, about forty years of age, who, when younger, had evidently been very handsome. He had, it seemed, already 'chouanné' a little in southern Brittany under Cadoudal.

The Marquis was standing talking to the newcomer by the big, projecting, smoke-blackened hearth, when a tall figure suddenly darkened the doorway of the cottage.

"Is M. de Flavigny within?" it inquired, and René recognised the voice as La Vireville's.

"Yes, I am here. Do you want me, Fortuné?" he asked, turning round from the hearth. The visitor did the same. And, as La Vireville stooped his head to enter, it occurred to de Flavigny to introduce him and St. Four, Chouans both of them.

"Let me make you and this gentleman known to each other first," he began. "M. de St. Four of the régiment d'Hector, M. le Chevalier de la Vire——"

The name died on his lips. La Vireville's eyes were not on him at all, but on the stranger, yet the look he wore was enough to slay instantly any attempt at introduction. The naked hatred and contempt on his face seemed to have frozen equally the other man and himself; then, after two or three seconds of an

intolerable silence, he turned without a word and walked straight out of the cottage.

The two other witnesses of this scene were also stricken dumb. M. de St. Four was the first to recover himself. He gave an uneasy laugh. De Flavigny, overwhelmed by the suddenness and inexplicability of the incident, began to stammer out some apology.

"It is of no consequence, Monsieur," said St. Four, shrugging his shoulders. "Your friend does not wish to know me, that is all." And he made an attempt to resume their conversation where it had been broken off, but, as was hardly surprising, without any marked success, and shortly afterwards he took his leave. De Flavigny also, as soon as he could, made an excuse to the others, and went in search of his friend.

(3)

La Vireville was not at his quarters, and it took some half-hour's search before the Marquis found him, sitting on a rock that faced the Atlantic on the side of the 'mer sauvage,' his chin on his clenched fists, staring out to sea.

At the sound of a step he turned round, and showed de Flavigny a face no longer, at least, like the Medusa's mask.

"Have you come for an apology, René? I owe you one, I admit."

"No; it is for me to apologise," said the Marquis, stepping on to the rock. "But I did not know——"

"Of course you did not. How could you? Fate is pleased to be humorous, but you could not realise to what degree. It was something of a pity that you could not." He laughed, a hard, mirthless laugh, and tearing off a piece of dried seaweed from the rock on which he sat, cast it towards the waves. The wind carried it away.

De Flavigny sat down by him. "Mon ami, the last

thing I wish to do is to pry into your affairs. I can only repeat that I am exceedingly sorry I was so clumsy as to cause you pain, and that, since his presence is displeasing to you, I will make it my care, as far as I can, that you do not meet the gentleman in question again."

"I don't suppose," said Fortuné de la Vireville between his teeth, "that he will seek for a repetition of the interview."

He looked out to sea again in silence. René glanced at his set mouth. His friendship was of too recent a date for him to know much of La Vireville's private history, but he, like others, had heard the rumour of a tragedy in his past, and he guessed that he now stood on its threshold. He was silent, while the sea, all a-sparkle in the sun, came splashing in a little below them, and the gulls, uttering their fine-weather chuckle, sailed slantwise in the wind.

"I never thought I should see him again," said La Vireville to himself, after a moment "—least of all here." And he pulled off another piece of seaweed and examined it minutely.

"You need never come into contact with him," repeated the Marquis.

"A woman asked me not long ago," observed La Vireville inconsequently, still examining the seaweed, "whether I could readily forgive a mortal injury. I told her . . . the truth. Yes, by God, it was the truth! . . . I think you have never had cause to hate anyone overmuch, René? Destiny, perhaps"—his face softened for a moment as he glanced at him—"but not a man—nor a woman."

"No," answered the Marquis. And he added, "Thank God!"

La Vireville threw him another glance, satirical this time. "Your pious ejaculation is quite justified. It is not an emotion to cultivate. Well, I suppose I ought to return to my flock, having sat on this promontory long enough." He dropped the piece of seaweed

carefully into a pool. "Where is . . . your protégé gone to?"

"Back to his regiment, I presume," answered de Flavigny. "Hector is quartered at Port Haliguen, as you know." He hesitated, then laid his hand on the Chouan's shoulder. "Fortuné, my dear friend, forgive me for saying it, but if you meet him again you will not quarrel with him? After all, every man here——"

La Vireville's face hardened again as he broke in. "My dear René, I know perfectly well what you are going to say. Private enmities must be sunk for the common weal, is it not? I assure you I am fully of your opinion. And, to reassure your scrupulous mind, let me tell you that M. de St. Four and I settled our score in that way ten years ago. You see that mark?" He touched his cheek. "That is the proof of it. Come, let us go back." He scrambled to his feet, and René de Flavigny followed him.

CHAPTER XXV

HISTORY OF A SCAR

(I)

THE gods, however, had not finished amusing themselves with the situation they had brought about, and planned an improvement on it. The very next day La Vireville was summoned to d'Hervilly's headquarters.

He found the general alone, in a room in a little house in Quiberon village, whose comfortable furniture, of English make, had obviously appeared there synchronously with its present occupant. The walls were impressively studded with maps, plans, and diagrams; the greatest military leader could not have got more of these into a smaller space. Unfortunately, La Vireville knew that M. d'Hervilly had never seen a shot fired until he came to Quiberon.

"I have sent for you, Monsieur," said the general, with the English accent that he always affected, "because I have come to the conclusion that the Chouan commanders who remain on the peninsula must have an officer from one of the émigré regiments attached to their corps to act as aide-de-camp, and, if necessary, as officier de liaison. I conceive that this plan will give more homogeneity to our forces, especially in view of the attack we shall shortly be making on the Republican position at Ste. Barbe."

He looked at the Chouan commander in question with angry eyes, as though both anticipating a criticism he would instantly resent, and demanding an

approval he would consider impertinent. La Vireville lifted his eyebrows a trifle, and said nothing, but amid the surprise and distaste which this announcement roused in him he was visited by a consoling thought. The general could impose one of his nominees on him, but could not ensure his making use of that nominee unless he wished. Perhaps, too, he could ask for de Flavigny in that capacity.

"I have naturally selected for this post," went on d'Hervilly, "gentlemen who have some acquaintance with the Chouan methods of warfare. As you may imagine, this considerably restricts my choice. Your aide-de-camp, as we may call him, will be"—he turned to a list on the table—"an officer who has spent some weeks with the Chouans of the Morbihan—M. de St. Four of the régiment d'Hector."

His hearer suddenly clenched his hands.

"Well, M. de la Vireville?"

"You cannot, I suppose, mon général," said the émigré, speaking with great deliberation, "consider individual preferences in this matter?"

"Certainly not, sir," snapped d'Hervilly. And he added, not unreasonably, "For one thing, I have no more suitable candidates available." With a tapping forefinger he drew the objector's attention to the scored-out list, whereon his name and his worst enemy's figured alone, the last of their respective columns.

"Very good, mon général," said La Vireville impassively. "And what do you want me to do with this gentleman who has spent some weeks in the Morbihan when I have got him?"

D'Hervilly glanced at him sharply, but except that the tone was certainly not obsequious he could find nothing to take hold of. "I will tell you," he said; and proceeded to give a short summary of the duties which he expected the Chouan to assign to this new subordinate, ending by saying pompously, "And in view of the fact that when we attack Ste. Barbe I shall probably put most of the Chouan troops with

Hector on the right wing, it will be very valuable to you to have an officer of Hector as your aide-de-camp."

"Certainly," agreed La Vireville. "And I am sure that I shall find M. de St. Four's services valuable in every respect. As soon, therefore, as you see fit to send him to me, mon général, I shall be ready to give him his instructions. May I ask if you have already informed him of his appointment?"

"No, not yet," replied d'Hervilly, running a pen through the two names. "That will do, M. de la Vireville."

But, happening to look up as La Vireville was saluting and turning away, he suddenly thumped the table and demanded in a furious voice, "What are you smiling like that for, sir?"

La Vireville committed the military and social breach of going out without answering.

(2)

About two hours afterwards, Charles le Goffic, former law-student, clad, as usual, in Breton costume, with an officer in English uniform behind him, knocked upon the door of a shed in the Chouan cantonments at St. Pierre, at the lower end of the peninsula, and, receiving a command to enter, did so. Inside were a trestle table, a couple of chairs, a bed of dried seaweed, and La Vireville.

"Monsieur Augustin," said Le Goffic, "here is M. le Capitaine de St. Four, sent by the Général Comte d'Hervilly."

His leader, seated at the table in this his head-quarters, looked up from his writing.

"I will see him at once," said he. "Be sure that the door is shut, Charles, and put a sentry outside."

And so Fortuné de la Vireville's one-time best friend, who had done him the worst injury, almost, that one

man can do another, came in and saluted him, and they confronted one another as they had done ten years ago, when the scar on La Vireville's face was a bright wound. But if the thought of that meeting was in both their minds, La Vireville at least gave no sign of it. Standing by the table he punctiliously returned the newcomer's salute.

"I am glad to see you, M. de St. Four," he said, in level tones, "so that we can settle the little matter of our relations to each other at the outset, and have done with it. We shall almost certainly be attacking the Republican position in a day or two, therefore it is as well to have them defined, if only for that reason."

"You can disembarrass yourself of me then," said the other, in a scarcely audible voice.

La Vireville shook his head. "If you are going to have those ideas we shall never get on. As you may imagine, this situation is none of my seeking, as I am sure it is none of yours. But since we are now in an official relation to each other, I should wish, for the sake of our common aim, to behave to you exactly as I should to any other officer who had been assigned to me in this capacity. If I am always to feel that you are expecting to be treated as Uriah was treated by David, the state of affairs will become very difficult. Of course, I quite understand that you suspect me of such a design . . . though you must admit that I should not stand to gain, now, what David gained by it." A flash of bitter mockery passed over his face, and, brief as it was, seemed to sear the other's into agony.

"Yes!" he broke out passionately, "if you lost, I lost too! A year was all I had—and for that I threw away my honour—and your friendship. And then I in my turn was thrown away. God! God!" He turned away, shaking.

La Vireville stood like a statue, as he had stood all along, his finger-tips just resting on the table

His eyes indeed followed St. Four, who went at last to the little window, and stood by it with his back to him, pulling at a piece of loose planking. But the life in them was of an icy quality, and when he spoke it was as if the other man's outburst had never been.

"I am making for you, Monsieur," he said, "a memorandum of what the general tells me I may expect of you. I regret that it is not ready, but M. d'Hervilly somewhat sprang this upon me. My lieutenant, Le Goffic, will show you your quarters. That is all for the present." He sat down again at the table, and pulling his papers towards him bent over them.

St. Four stopped fidgetting with the woodwork and turned round. But he did not go. On the contrary, he came a little nearer, and spoke, not without dignity. "La Vireville, you were generous once. I acknowledge it. You gave me my life. . . . Is it any solace to you to know that I have often wished you had not made me that gift? I am not surprised that you would not take my hand. But is it possible that some day . . . for the sake of the cause, and because, as you know, I have suffered too . . . horribly . . . you might be able to forgive me, Fortuné?"

"I am not aware, Monsieur," returned La Vireville without looking up, "that I have authorised you to use my Christian name. There is, however, no objection to your calling me Augustin, as my men do. You will find Le Goffic outside."

And St. Four, making a hopeless gesture, turned and went out without a word. La Vireville looked after him a moment, dipped his pen in the ink, and resumed his writing.

(3)

That evening, as he was eating his solitary meal by the light of a candle stuck in a bottle, René de Flavigny suddenly appeared in the doorway of the shed.

"Come in, my friend," cried the Chouan cheerfully. "Are you proposing to share my modest repast?"

"No," replied the Marquis, entering. "I only came to ask you if this extraordinary report is true, and that the general has given you M. de St. Four, of all men, as an aide-de-camp?"

"Yes, it is quite true," replied La Vireville composedly. "I have seen M. d'Hervilly and I have seen St. Four—quite a peaceable interview, the latter, on my honour. Have some of this cheese, Marquis!"

"But—but it is intolerable!" stammered de Flavigny, sinking into the other chair.

"What—the cheese? Not at all; it is English. Try it!"

René looked at him, but could gather nothing. The single candle by his friend's elbow, ineffectual at its best in that dark place, flickered woefully in the strong draught. The Marquis had left the door of the shed ajar, and through it came, on the wind that smelt of seaweed, the sound that day and night was ever in their ears—the eternal recurrent plunge and retreat of the tide—and the glint of stars. He got up, shut it, and came back.

"Fortuné, what are you going to do with him?"

"Set him in the forefront of the battle, of course!"

This statement was to de Flavigny not susceptible of belief, though the speaker's smile in the now steadied candlelight was enough to give it credibility.

"At least, that is what he seems to expect," went on La Vireville, proceeding also with his meal. "And surely I could not do better than emulate the Psalmist King. I am sorry I have no wine to offer you, mon ami. Perhaps you have already supped, however. By the way, have you heard anything about the approaching arrival of a fresh division of émigré troops —Sombreuil's?"

"Yes, I have heard something," answered the

Marquis absently. "I see that you do not want to speak of this business, Fortuné; you must forgive me for having referred to it."

La Vireville laid down his knife. "On the contrary, I am minded to tell you once for all why I do not find M. de St. Four's company congenial. Figure to yourself, my dear René, that ten years ago he ran off with my affianced wife."

"Bon Dieu!"

"It has occurred before in the history of the world," said La Vireville coolly and with a curling lip—sneering at himself, so de Flavigny thought. "Only he happened to be my best friend. That, as you may guess, made it much more . . . interesting. Also, it was but the day before my marriage. Now you know why I did not fall into his arms a short time ago when you wanted me to."

Beyond the fact that he was unusually pale, one thing alone betrayed that he was on the rack—his voice. Not that it was unsteady. René was almost as much in torture as he, but it seemed best to follow his lead and avoid at least the expression of emotion.

"You called him out?" he hazarded after a moment, thinking of the scar whose half-revealed history was now clear to him.

La Vireville nodded. "He gave me this memento, as I told you the other day." He poured out some cider, and added, "As for me, I was fool enough to fire in the air."

"You loved—*her*—as much as that!" cried the Marquis before he could stop himself.

The little remaining colour ebbed slowly from La Vireville's face, and, like a palimpsest, all the suffering written below its sardonic gaiety was abruptly visible. He did not answer, and René, ashamed to have unveiled it, put his own hand over his eyes as if to shade them from the candle. "He loves her still," he said to himself.

La Vireville suddenly laughed, and the sound made his companion jump.

"I might as well have shot him after all," he said, with cold levity.

"Why?"

"She left him after a year for another man. Dramatic justice, was it not?—and a lesson to me always to follow my first impulses! But I have bored you with my affairs long enough. As I have no wine, will you drink a glass of cider? There is little variety of vintage on this damned peninsula."

But René de Flavigny refused, and, rising, flung his cloak about him. La Vireville surely was better alone. He longed to ask if the woman were still alive, but dared not.

La Vireville's face, however, was an enigma once more. He took the Marquis's outstretched hand across the table.

"You, at least, cannot betray me in that way. I am not affianced now!" he said; and with that bitter jest, which René pardoned for the pain still alive in the speaker's eyes, they parted.

Going back in the summer starlight, thinking of what had just passed, he overtook another officer of the régiment du Dresnay, also returning from St. Pierre.

"Have you heard," asked the latter, "that the attack is fixed for the night of the fifteenth?"

"But there is a fresh division on its way," objected de Flavigny—"the regiments with the black cockade. D'Hervilly will wait for them, of course."

His companion put his hand on his arm. "Young Sombreuil, who is in command, is senior in the English service to d'Hervilly."

"Well?"

"D'Hervilly will find that he cannot wait for them!"

"I cannot believe that!" exclaimed the Marquis, shocked.

"You will see," said his brother officer.

CHAPTER XXVI

STE. BARBE—AND AFTERWARDS

(I)

JUST as on the day when he had first entered the cottage in Clouarnet village to look for his friend, and had met his deadly foe, so now Fortuné de la Vireville stood hesitating on the same threshold, because he feared to find, already in possession, a Foe more deadly still. As on that day, too, it seemed dark within, coming from the brilliant sunshine outside. Was that why he put his hand for a moment over his eyes?

On the floor by the wall, at the left of the door, under a cloak, could be dimly seen the figure of an officer, lying very still. Another sat by the empty hearth with his head between his hands. Fortuné straightened himself, went in, and touched the man by the hearth on the shoulder.

And René de Flavigny lifted the face of one who has come from a great distance, across centuries of time, and saw him standing there, powder-grimed, with sand on his clothes and in his hair, and carrying his left hand thrust into his short blue embroidered Breton vest. The sleeve of his coat bore, high up, a dark red stain.

"I was afraid for you," said La Vireville abruptly and rather hoarsely. "I knew that your regiment . . . I went to Fort Penthièvre. I had to step over the wounded, they are lying so thick there. . . . Well, thank God you are safe!"

"Yes, I am safe," responded de Flavigny, in a dull voice.

"You are not touched at all?"

The Marquis shook his head. "What of you?" he asked.

La Vireville gave a sort of laugh. "Oh, as for us Chouans," he said, replying in general terms, though he must have known that the inquiry was particular, "those of us who did not run shared the fate of Hector, and you know what that fate was. . . . We had to go back with them under the range of the guns. God alone—if He—knows what possessed d'Hervilly to give that order. He is dying, they say——"

"Your arm!" exclaimed his friend, pointing to it. He seemed incapable of prolonged speech.

"Only a flesh wound," replied La Vireville, glancing down at it indifferently. "A splinter of shell, I think; I was knocked down by one." He went and looked down at the dead officer by the wall, and came back without saying anything. "I must get back to what is left of my men. Poor Le Goffic is badly wounded. I only came to make sure of your safety, René."

The Marquis was on his feet now. "But for one thing," said he, suddenly finding speech, and pointing to the quiet figure under the cloak, "I would rather be in his place."

"I can guess what that thing is," returned La Vireville, making to go; "but though I have no son, like you, to live for, and the man I have hated so long is dead—I think he saved my life—yet I want to live . . . for to-morrow."

"*Will there be a to-morrow?*" asked the Marquis de Flavigny, with sombre emphasis.

La Vireville, who was already half-way to the door, stopped dead, and turned to face that question.

"No, René, perhaps not," said he very gravely, and there was a silence.

"There is now only the fort between us and Hoche's

advance," went on the Marquis. "If that goes, we shall be swept into the sea."

"I know," replied the Chouan. He seemed to be waiting still for something else to be said.

De Flavigny came up to him and took his hand. "Fortuné, I have a great favour to ask of you, and I must ask you now, for I have a presentiment that I shall never have another chance to make the request."

"Ask," said his friend.

"I do not think that I shall ever see England again," went on the Marquis. "If I do not, and you escape, I want you to promise me to look after Anne. Don't refuse me, Fortuné! Mr. Elphinstone is an old man, and when he dies there will be nobody of my blood—nobody of our nationality even—about the boy, and he is French, and I should wish him to remain French, although in exile. By my will he inherits all I have, and nearly all his grandfather's property will eventually come to him, so he will be well provided for. There is no one in the world, after his grandfather, to whom I would rather commit him than you. He is very fond of you—and, Fortuné, he has a kind of claim on you already, since you did that for him which can never be forgotten, though you will not allow me even to thank you for it!"

La Vireville had heard him silently to the end, looking down at the beaten earth of the cottage floor. "But if we come to final disaster, which, God knows, seems probable enough," he said quietly, "it is not likely that I shall see England again either. Not that I have any special presentiments about my own fate—one soon gets rid of those en chouannant—but because I think, with you, that we are in a desperate strait. Unless Puisaye, now that d'Hervilly is dying . . . though I do not believe that Puisaye is the man to save us. Yet we *may* beat them off."

"Will you promise me, then, to do your utmost, if the worst happens, to save yourself, for Anne's sake,

if not for your own? Will you promise me that, Fortune?"

La Vireville looked him in the eyes and gripped the hand he held. "Yes, I promise you that, René. So it be not inconsistent with honour, I will do my best to save myself—and if you are killed, and I live to return, Anne shall be my . . . son."

But how far off, how incongruous, in the midst of this welter of blood and catastrophe, was the thought of that little boy, with his confiding ways! Outside his own quarters at St. Pierre, Fortuné met the surgeon who was attending to the Chouan wounded, and, going in with him, displaced Grain d'Orge, who, looking like a necromancer, was giving attentions of very doubtful value to the moaning Le Goffic on his heap of seaweed.

"Monsieur Augustin," whispered the self-constituted leech, while the surgeon examined the young Breton, "this is not a good place, this Quiberon!"

"Your remark is very just, mon vieux!" returned La Vireville, half sadly, half humorously. "You are not the first to make it, either. Do you want to go back to the Côtes-du-Nord? There is the devil of a deal of fighting before you if you wish to do that."

"Ma Doué, I am sure of it!" said Grain d'Orge with a chuckle. He rubbed off some blood, presumably Le Goffic's, from his hands on to his baggy breeches. "You and I, Monsieur Augustin, have seen much of that—and of this too," he added, laying a grimy finger on La Vireville's wounded arm. "And I know that *I* shall see my parish again, because the wise woman told me so before I left. But not many of the others, perhaps."

A sudden compunction invaded La Vireville. It was his influence which had led these children of Northern Brittany away from their homes to perish in what was, to them, almost a foreign land.

"Listen to me, mon gars," he said. "If ever I give the word for a sauve qui peut, for disbandment,

in short, remember it is because I am convinced that each man, separately, has a better chance for his life than with the rest. If you gained the mainland, it would be difficult to distinguish any of you from the inhabitants there, to prove, indeed, that you had ever been in Quiberon at all."

Grain d'Orge's little eyes twinkled. "That is very true, Monsieur Augustin. I will remember."

And La Vireville, as he bent down to hear what the surgeon thought of Le Goffic, had a conviction that the wise woman had not been wrong about Grain d'Orge, who, of incorruptible fidelity though he was, had too much innate cunning not to succeed in saving his own skin.

"I think he will do," said the surgeon, and gave directions. "The rest—ah, but what have you there yourself, Monsieur? We will have your coat off at once, if you please!"

"I am not made of porcelain," protested La Vireville. "I know what it is—a flesh wound merely. I want my men all seen to first."

But to this the surgeon only responded by starting to slit up the stained sleeve himself.

(2)

Shortly afterwards, when his wound had been probed and dressed, and he found himself set, by the surgeon's orders, to sit a little beside Le Goffic, La Vireville had time to think—or rather, the scenes and sensations with which his brain was spinning began to unroll themselves before him again.

And first, he was marching with his men over the sand and coarse grass up towards Ste. Barbe. It was one o'clock in the morning, and very dark. Six hundred Chouans they were altogether, with the other bodies of the same composition, and, as d'Hervilly had told him it would be, they were on the extreme

right of the émigré regiments. The régiment d'Hector —the régiment de la Marine—was next them, on their left.

The sand, fine and white, muffled their footfalls, light, in any case, as became those of intermittent poachers. Just behind La Vireville was St. Four, who never spoke, in his British uniform. But La Vireville had not thought of him; his brain had been busy with what they were doing, or hoping to do.

And hope, indeed, had obstacles to surmount. Where, for instance, were the large bodies of Chouans under Tinténiac and another, who had been despatched several days ago into the interior for the purpose of attacking Ste. Barbe simultaneously from the rear? To anyone who knew Tinténiac as La Vireville did, their non-appearance was very strange. They might yet come up in time. If they did not, then d'Hervilly's refusal to postpone the attack for twenty-four hours in order to allow of the landing of Sombreuil's division —still out there in their transports in the bay—was deprived of its only justification.

They marched on. Far away the fires of the Republican bivouacs were visible through the darkness, at the foot of the rising ground of Ste. Barbe. . . .

The scene shifted. It was dawn now. They were still advancing, having passed the Republican outposts with scarcely a struggle, for the enemy, acting no doubt on instructions, had abandoned them and had fallen back on the strong entrenched camp. In that uncompromising light of dawn La Vireville could see how strong they were—a long line of entrenchments with two redoubts and several batteries, bristling with four-pounders, and well provided with heavy guns and mortars. And he knew instinctively that his Chouans were casting sidelong glances at those sinister black mouths. It was not the kind of thing that they liked or were accustomed to.

But he also perceived, with a leap of the heart,

that there was a much better thing to be done than attacking these in front. The tide was out, and for that reason they had only to go on as they were going, and they could turn the batteries and take them in the rear. If only d'Hervilly would send orders to that end! For d'Hervilly was away on the left with his own regiment, while Puisaye, strangely enough, was with the rearguard.

He was just thinking of communicating his hopes to St. Four when orders to halt came down from the head of the combined column, where the officer in command, a grand seigneur, the Duc de Lévis, could be seen on his horse. They halted.

La Vireville turned with a frown to St. Four, and read his own uneasiness in his enemy's eyes. He nodded, and the officer of Hector, saluting, disappeared.

"Are we going to attack now, Monsieur Augustin?" whispered Grain d'Orge, coming up, carrying his musket in a fashion peculiar to himself. "The sooner the better."

La Vireville knew that as well as he. He was quite aware that you must keep the Chouan on the move, or watching from behind a hedge—but not in the open, doing nothing, where his thoughts get too much for him.

"I expect so," he returned. "Go back to your place."

Minutes passed. The dawn grew brighter in a pale, clear, tender sky. The men began to fidget. Then—a relief—the order came to march on. The column moved on a little, then stopped again.

Le Goffic came up—he who lay, looking like death, beside him now. "Monsieur Augustin, the men are getting impatient—that is to say——"

"Tell them," interrupted La Vireville brutally, "that I have given you orders to shoot instantly anyone who either stirs now, or who refuses to stir when he is told to!"

For he knew what Le Goffic's euphemism meant.

And then at last St. Four came hurrying back, the sweat on his face and tears of wrath in his eyes.

"D'Hervilly is mad—mad!" he gasped. "He is going to attack away there on the left front by himself—with the left wing only. He says Hector can 'come on afterwards!' Hector will be wiped out if they go back now under the fire of the batteries to rejoin the left wing . . . and so shall we be! But go back they will—there is nothing else to do. My God, what insanity!"

If Hector went back, so must the Chouans, or be left in the air. It was the death-knell of the little irregular force. Both men knew it, and their faces were very grim as they stared at one another for a moment. Then La Vireville turned away to give his orders. So much for the sound, the obvious, plan of attacking the batteries in the rear!

Before he had finished, the drums of the régiment d'Hector, on their left, were beating the charge. . . .

Le Goffic groaned. His leader got up, and, as well as he could with one arm in a sling, gave him a drink.

"Merci, maman!" said the young man, without opening his eyes.

There was a depression in the dunes, a sort of corridor between two little eminences. Every clod of it, every blade of grass against the young sky, La Vireville could see now if he shut his eyes. For it was into that little sandy hollow of death, dominated as it was by three batteries at half-cannon shot, that he and his men had been obliged to follow the régiment d'Hector.

For a moment its image, as it rested with him, was blotted out by the picture of a whirlwind, the flying Chouan column, broken at the first thunder of the Republican guns. Fortuné saw again the Duc de Lévis on his horse in the midst of the torrent, trying vainly to rally the distracted peasants, and literally unable to keep up with them at the gallop, so fast did they

flee. How La Vireville himself had succeeded in keeping his contingent together he scarcely knew—yet they *had* followed him. . . . There was cover of a sort here, in the ravine, and cover they knew instinctively how to utilise. But the fire was murderous.

" Courage, mes gars, this will soon be over, and then we can advance again ! " he had shouted, believing anything but what he had said. It was worse, far worse, than the cannonade at Auray, but this time his men could not run. They fell instead, and, raging inwardly, he had watched one after another go down. . . . At last he saw Le Goffic throw out his arms and stagger. Hastily he threw down his empty musket (for he was firing like the rest) to go to him, and as he did so, heard a cry behind him :

" Look out, La Vireville, look out ! " The voice was St. Four's. Concurrently there came the whistle of a shell, and Fortuné was sent reeling a couple of yards forward—the result, as he instantly realised, of a very rough push from his aide-de-camp. The next moment there was a violent explosion, and, amid showers of sand, he was hurled on to his back.

Half buried in sand and rubbish he struggled as quickly as he could to his feet, and, rather dazed, looked round. Several of his men began to run towards him, but his own gaze was fixed on the figure of St. Four in his red uniform, lying motionless a few yards away. La Vireville hurried to him. But there was no need of haste, nor possibility of aid. The back of his head was blown away.

Whether St. Four had actually saved his life or no, his intention of doing so seemed clear then to La Vireville, remembering how his enemy had thrown himself against him when he had heard the shell coming. He stood a second or two looking down at the man whom he could not forgive. The brain that had planned and carried out his betrayal now lay spilt on the sand at his feet. " But that does not undo what he did ? " Who was it had said that ? . . . He stooped and covered

the terrible evidence of mortality with his handkerchief, a red trickle coursing down his own wrist the while. . . .

Le Goffic in his unconsciousness was moaning and muttering again. This time it was something about "Yvonne."

"Mon pauvre gars!" murmured La Vireville, bending over him. "I am afraid you have your marching orders, whatever the surgeon may say."

How had Le Goffic been got here—how had any of them come alive out of that place, where the sand was pitted with grapeshot like dust after a thunderstorm? He could hardly tell even now. Long after the order to retire should have come, the régiment d'Hector and the little Chouan contingent, both fearfully reduced, had gone on stoically firing and falling. . . . La Vireville had heard since that d'Hervilly, the author of the disaster, had given the word for retirement earlier, but that aide-de-camp after aide-de-camp to whom it was entrusted had been shot down, and then d'Hervilly himself received his own mortal wound. And when at last the order reached them, the régiment d'Hector, whose losses had already been so great, was obliged to sacrifice its company of cadets, boys of fifteen and sixteen, before the manœuvre could be carried out.

Well, somehow they had got out of the slaughter. And, afterwards, the cost of failure was counted—du Dresnay (René's regiment) fearfully cut up, its lieutenant-colonel in command killed; Hector—so valuable a corps by reason of the experienced naval officers which it contained—reduced to half its effectives; and in Loyal-Emigrant, out of a hundred and twenty veteran chevaliers de St. Louis, only forty-five returned from the attack. Other regiments had been less exposed—but all had suffered. . . .

La Vireville, still kneeling by Le Goffic, passed his

hand over his eyes as though to wipe away a vision. Seasoned as he was, the past twelve hours had provided him with rather more in the way of sensation than he could stomach. St. Four was dead. He himself had promised, in certain circumstances, to be responsible for Anne-Hilarion. Lastly, irretrievable disaster was moving swiftly upon them. There was only Fort Penthièvre, as René had said, between them and Hoche's advance.

And, suddenly, a couple of snatches of Anne-Hilarion's favourite ballad floated up to Fortuné's brain from the region where, all unconsciously, he must have stored them that afternoon when he had heard it from the child's lips in the cave by Kerdronan. The first related to some man, whose name did not revisit him, lying drowned, fifty fathoms down, 'with the Scots lords at his feet.' The second brought with it the same picture which it had conjured up for him then—of the fisherman's young wife waiting in vain, in her cottage on the shore, for the husband who had been sacrificed, really, on the same altar as to-day's victims—and to-morrow's.

"O lang, lang may the maidens sit
Wi' their gowd kames in their hair,
A-waiting for their ain dear loves!
For them they'll see nae mair."

He cast a last look at Le Goffic, and, going to the door of the shed, went forth into the sunshine and the suffering outside.

CHAPTER XXVII

La Vireville breaks his Sword

(I)

The hour when their last defence should fail them was nearer even than any of the Royalists had imagined. All next day, and the next, while Sombreuil's contingent—the émigrés with the black cockade, the regiments who had fought side by side with the British in the Netherlands campaign of 1794–95, and had endured with them the terrible retreat of that winter—were being disembarked on to a shore which was all too likely to be their grave, the garrison of Fort Penthièvre was leaking away to the enemy. And on the night of the twentieth, a dark night of rain and tempest, three hundred of Hoche's grenadiers, led by one of these deserters, came creeping, knee-deep in water, round the base of the fort on the side of the 'mer sauvage,' and men of d'Hervilly's own regiment helped them over the parapet. . . .

At half-past one on the morning of the twenty-first of July the sound of a cannon, indistinctly heard amid the howling of the wind, came to the ears of the wounded Le Goffic, where he lay wakeful on his couch of seaweed in the lantern-light. He put out a feverish hand and touched his leader, stretched out in sleep beside him.

La Vireville started up instantly. "What is it, my boy? Do you need anything?"

"I heard a cannon-shot, Monsieur Augustin," replied

the young man in his weak voice. "It must have been from the fort, I think."

"Then it is being attacked—or, more probably, surprised," said Fortuné, reaching for his pistols. Almost at the same moment Grain d'Orge, a lantern in his hand, appeared in the doorway.

"The Blues have got the upper part of the fort, Monsieur Augustin," he shouted. "They are killing everybody inside——"

"Get the men ready—those that are able-bodied," said La Vireville, snatching up his sword. "I will be with you in an instant."

"There is such a cursed wind!" grumbled the Chouan, disappearing with his lantern.

La Vireville knelt down by Le Goffic. "Good-bye, Charles! If the worst come to the worst, and if I do not return, there are plenty of slightly wounded men here in St. Pierre who can take you off to the English squadron. I have seen to that already."

The young man looked up at his leader with undimmed affection and trust shining out of his sunken eyes, and put his hot hands over La Vireville's right, that held the sheathed sword.

"If you do not come back, I would rather have died with you, Monsieur le Chevalier! Let me fasten on your sword for you . . . you cannot do it with your arm thus."

The feeble fingers fumbled with the buckle, but Fortuné, guessing what the rendering of that last service meant to his young lieutenant, waited patiently till they had accomplished their task. Then he stooped down and kissed him, French fashion, on both cheeks.

Outside was darkness, confusion, and violent wind. But his men were marshalling. Already Vauban's Chouans, in disorder and with recriminations, were setting out up the peninsula towards the scene of the fresh disaster.

" Are all here who should be ? " shouted Fortuné in Grain d'Orge's ear.

The old Chouan held a half-cocked pistol in his other hand. He nodded. " All but Yannik. He said he would not go, so I——" He lifted the pistol.

La Vireville nodded. " Give me the lantern." And with it he went forward to the little ranks, now pitifully depleted. " Mes gars," he cried, holding the lantern high, and running his eyes over the rows of familiar faces, " this is our last chance. We must help retake the fort. If it is not retaken, all is finished. But listen now. If I think that to fight any further is useless I shall give the word—Every man for himself." And he explained, as he had explained to Grain d'Orge, his reason for this course. " Do you understand, mes enfants, and will you follow me till I give that word ? "

He was not sure that they would. But they had known and trusted and somewhat feared him long before their recent unforgettable experiences of artillery outside Auray and at Ste. Barbe. They shouted back their acquiescence.

" And then," yelled Grain d'Orge, putting in his word, " if M. Augustin is pleased with you, he will come back to us at Kerdronan, and we can go on again with *that* kind of fighting——"

" I wish to God that I had never brought them away from Kerdronan," thought La Vireville, as he turned away and put himself at their head.

(2)

They never reached the fort. The way towards it was blocked with the fruit of past mistakes, with masses of fugitives—mainly the dispossessed Bretons of the mainland, that unpropitious flotsam which the events of July the sixth had swept on to the peninsula —pouring away from the scene of calamity. The diffi-

culty of struggling with a handful of men through this flood, all setting in the opposite direction, was enormous. It was almost impossible to keep together. However, they fought their way on, their heads down, buffeted by the wind and by the bodies of the fugitives, physically and morally disheartened, till at last the light of the wet, cheerless dawn was strong enough to show, in the distance, the grey bulk of Fort Penthièvre, looking doubly massive and formidable now that it was no longer in their hands. For, as La Vireville realised with a pang no less keen because it was anticipated, the golden lilies floated there no more. In their stead, flaring defiantly out in the wind and rain over counterscarp and glacis, was the red, white, and blue of the Republic.

"Halt!" cried La Vireville, and remained a moment staring at that significant sight. Then he called for Grain d'Orge.

"Mon vieux, the moment has come," he said sadly. "I give the word to disband. It is not right to sacrifice the rest of the men uselessly. Remember what I told you about the mainland. Try to get them all taken off in the boats of the English squadron, which will be possible if the wind goes down."

"But you, Monsieur Augustin, what will you do?" asked the old Chouan, seizing him by the hand. His eyes were glistening in most unfamiliar fashion, while with his other hand he fumbled inside his embroidered vest, finally drawing out thence a long, reddish-brown, hairy object, somewhat shrivelled, and tufted at the end.

"Take this, Monsieur le Chevalier," he urged, pressing it into his leader's hand. "It will certainly bring you back safe to Kerdronan. The wise woman gave it to me."

"No, no, mon gars," said La Vireville, rather touched, but not altogether taken with the appearance of the gift. "Keep it to ensure your own safety. But . . . what the devil is it?"

"A cow's tail that has been offered to St. Herbot at his chapel in Finistère," replied the Breton. "You will not take it, Monsieur Augustin? It has great virtue."

But La Vireville was firm in his refusal, and Grain d'Orge, replacing his talisman, moved off to convey his orders to the already melting band of Chouans. He came back, however, in a moment or two to repeat his question.

"What will you do, Monsieur Augustin?"

"For the present," replied his leader composedly, "I am going to offer my sword to anyone here who will accept it."

(3)

And that was why the Chevalier de la Vireville found himself, half an hour later, under the command of the Comte de Contades, trying, with Loyal-Emigrant and the remnants of d'Hervilly's regiment, to stem the steady advance of Hoche's forces, that outnumbered the Royalists by three to one. But everything was against them. The little eminence on which they fell back might well have been defended had not the Blues already got possession of the park of artillery at Portivy, which, owing to lack of horses, had not been removed in time. So they fell back once more, in good order, not a man of them attempting to join the throngs at Port d'Orange, where the sick and wounded, and some of the regimental colours, were, despite the tempest, being embarked on the boats of the English flotilla.

It was now about four o'clock in the morning, and the rain had turned to mist. It was in this mist that, still retiring before the relentless pressure of the Blues, the two regiments came to the knoll by the hamlet of St. Julien, where the troops of the second division were quartered under their commander, the young Comte de Sombreuil, the brother of the heroine

of the 'glass of blood.' Here, on his horse at their head, a gallant figure in his hussar's dolman of chamois colour faced with red, his high shako looped about with cords and decorated with the black cockade, was Sombreuil himself.

And La Vireville heard him say to Contades, his handsome young face contracted with pain, " Puisaye told me to remain here, and Puisaye himself has embarked ! "

For some time Fortuné had been asking himself what had become of the general-in-chief, and yet the answer, now that it had come, seemed incredible. But it was confirmed by the lieutenant-colonel of the régiment de Rohan, when he came up with his men, who had been ordered to hold the little battery at Port d'Orange, and could not, because the battery consisted merely of one small cannon without ammunition or even a gun-carriage. La Vireville began to see why Puisaye, a moral if not a physical coward, had fled from a situation which he was incompetent to control, and disasters of his own making which it was too late to repair.

There was no time to do more than to curse this extraordinary defection. The mist was breaking before the full daylight, and turning once more to rain, as the Comte de Sombreuil took command, disposing his little force in line, from the régiment de Rohan on the extreme right, the side of the sea, to du Dresnay (de Flavigny's regiment) on the left, by the windmill. He threw out, too, a company of the new-comers in advance, and posted two regiments of them in the rear. But some of these just-landed corps had not more than three cartridges to a man ; one of the rearguard regiments, in fact, had none at all until its neighbour shared with it. And they were not the only bodies either who had to share their ammunition. Cartridges there were in plenty for all, but their distribution had not been finished before the surprise of the fort. . . .

La Vireville, in the ranks of that veteran corps, Loyal-Emigrant, learnt this fact with a sort of resignation. And what were they waiting for now? he asked himself. With the brave and disciplined troops at Sombreuil's command he might well have attacked Humbert's cautiously advancing column with the bayonet. When he at last ordered the advance it was too late, for hardly had the émigrés begun to go forward when an officer, arriving in haste from the left wing, announced that the soldiers of du Dresnay and d'Hervilly, after killing some of their officers, had gone over to the enemy. The Republicans were in possession of the windmill height, and indeed their guns were already beginning a murderous cannonade from that eminence. The Royalists had therefore no choice but to beat a retreat. Word spread that Sombreuil intended to retire to the Fort Neuf, on the shore south-east of Port Haliguen, and there surrender upon terms. When La Vireville heard this he made a grimace, for he happened to know what the 'fort' was like.

So they began their last withdrawal, still slowly and in good order, but forced all the time by the lack of cartridges to go through the bitter farce of taking aim without firing; and were thus driven gradually down to the extremity of the peninsula and the sea. The shore was covered with fugitives, mostly peasants and Chouans, running towards the Fort Neuf or trying desperately to get a place in the overcrowded boats of the English squadron, which, despite the high sea that was running, had been hard at work, but were now being obliged to abandon their efforts. And it was now that La Vireville, sword in hand—for he could not use a musket—came suddenly on an officer lying, wrapped about in a cloak, in a little dip in the sand-hills. Two soldiers stood near him, looking down at him. Fortuné had no time to wonder who it was, for he saw at once the drawn features of René de Flavigny.

He stopped and knelt down by him among the

coarse grass and the sea-pinks. On the scarlet of the English tunic, with its black facings, no blood was visible, but the grey of the Marquis's face was evidence enough of what had happened. His eyes were closed, and La Vireville half thought him unconscious.

"Where are you hit, René?" he asked quietly.

De Flavigny opened his eyes. "Shot in the back," he said in a faint voice. "But . . . it would be of no account . . . if only . . . O my God! It was my own men!" He raised a trembling hand and put it over his eyes. "O my God!" he said again.

"You must be got off to the English fleet without delay," said La Vireville with decision, though his heart sank. "How did you come here?"

"We carried him, mon officier," replied one of the soldiers, coming forward and saluting, and La Vireville saw that he was a sergeant of du Dresnay. "We will try to get him into a boat—but it will be very difficult. They are nearly all gone back to the ships."

"For God's sake do your best, however!" urged the Chouan.

"It is useless, Fortuné," whispered de Flavigny. "You see I was right. Remember your promise. . . . Kiss me . . . and kiss Anne for me." And, as La Vireville bent and kissed him, he relapsed into unconsciousness.

There was not a moment to lose. Already the little group was isolated between the retiring Royalists and the oncoming Republicans. La Vireville hastily thrust some money into the soldiers' hands, saw them raise their insensible burden, picked up his sword, and ran back to the retreating ranks.

(4)

And by the crumbling, four-foot walls of the little fort—a veritable children's citadel of sand—with its one rusty cannon that pointed seawards, amid the

roar of the waves, the cries of the drowning, and the persistent booming of the guns of the English corvette, the *Lark* (which, by firing steadily on the stretch of beach and sandhills between the defeated and the conquerors, was retarding rather than averting the inevitable), the last words were written on the fatal page of Quiberon.

First of all, from the grenadiers drawn up behind their artillery among the dunes, where the corvette's fire could not touch them, came Rouget de Lisle, his scarcely three-years-old immortality upon him, to parley with Sombreuil. When he went back, Hoche, for the first time, showed himself, and Sombreuil rode out of the fort to meet him.

From just within the low wall La Vireville watched the interview of the two young soldiers, the victor and the vanquished. No one of either force was near enough to hear what they said to each other. But reiterated shouts came from the Republican ranks: "Lay down your arms, comrades!" "Surrender, and you shall be safe!" The rain, falling, falling, seemed a fit pall for the broken hopes that were going down in night, the melancholy cry of the gulls that wheeled overhead a fit requiem. The golden lilies were in the dust, and all was vain—ardour and sacrifice and devotion—as vain as the fury and despair that saw them wither, watered though they were with the best blood of France.

Sombreuil came back from his brief interview. It went instantly through the lines of waiting Royalists that he had bargained with Hoche for their lives—for all their lives except his own—at the price of capitulation. And indeed he was heard to say to those who pressed round him, "My friends, save yourselves, or else surrender!"

But there was no possibility of saving themselves now. The English ships, having done all they could, had withdrawn into the middle of the bay; not a boat was visible. Only the corvette still continued

her stubborn fire. . . . And suddenly the unfortunate young leader realised that the last door was closed, for La Vireville saw him, in a paroxysm of despair, strike spurs into his horse and try to force him over the rocks into the sea—not the only man there to prefer the Roman ending. But the animal, rearing violently, refused the leap, and in a moment or two his rider had regained his self-command, had dismounted, and was attempting, with his handkerchief, to signal the *Lark* to cease firing.

Evidently the signal was not seen, for the corvette's guns still thundered away at the beach, and Hoche, coming up with the two 'representatives of the people,' Tallien and Blad, in their plumed head-dresses, seemed to be expostulating with Sombreuil on the point.

"He says that if a man of his is killed——" reported a youth near enough to hear, and left the sentence significantly unfinished.

"A lieutenant of the régiment de la Marine is going to swim off to the corvette."

"Then he will be drowned for certain," muttered La Vireville, turning and looking at that wild sea which must have put an end to René's last faint chance of escape.

(But he was wrong about the swimmer, for Gesril du Papeu not only accomplished his mission, but swam back again—to another kind of death.)

And soon to those in the little fort, when the thud and reverberation of the *Lark's* cannon had ceased, came insistently that sound which in all this desperate business had never been absent from their ears—the great voice of the sea, counting out the hours that were left, till those ears should be deaf to tide and wind for ever. So, after all the hours of tension (for it was now nearly one o'clock in the afternoon), the supreme moment of humiliation and disaster came at last. Charles de Sombreuil slowly detached his sabre, half-drew the blade from its sheath, kissed it

reverently, and gave it into Tallien's hands, and Tallien put it into those of Rouget de Lisle. Then the soldiers surrounded the young hussar, and he was lost to sight. The expedition to Quiberon was over.

And as the grenadiers in their blue and white came pouring into the enclosure of the fort, La Vireville (like not a few others) broke his sword under his heel and flung it over the wall into the sea.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MR. TOLLEMACHE AS AN ARCHANGEL

(I)

"GRANDPAPA," said Anne-Hilarion, "please to tell me what is 'ven-al-ity'?"

Mr. Elphinstone looked up. "Eh, what, child?"

"I read in this great book," proceeded Anne-Hilarion, "'This ven-al-ity co-in-cid-ing with the spirit of in-de-pend-ence and en-cro-ach-ment common to all the Pol-y-gars pro-cur-ed them——"

"God bless my soul, what book have you got hold of?" demanded the old man; but before he could pull himself out of his arm-chair to see, there was a knock at the library door, and Elspeth stood revealed.

"Maister Anne's bedtime," she observed severely, and stood waiting.

Almost at the same moment Baptiste appeared at her side, in his hands a salver, and on the salver a china bowl. "M. le Comte mangera-t-il avant de monter, ou dans sa chambre?" he inquired.

M. le Comte looked from his retainers to his grandfather. His preference was so clearly visible in his expression that Mr. Elphinstone, whipping off his spectacles, said:

"He will have his bread-and-milk down here to-night, Baptiste. I will ring for you, Elspeth, when he has finished."

Mrs. Saunders retired, with a tightening of her tight lips, and the old valet, advancing victoriously, placed the steaming bowl on the table beside the

volume of Orme's *British India* which had been engaging the child's attention. Anne-Hilarion, who had screwed himself round in his chair, turned his dangling legs once more tablewards.

For a few minutes nothing was heard in the large, book-lined room, this July evening, but the noise of a spoon stirring the contents of a bowl, and the old gentleman by the fireless hearth went on with his reading. But presently the spoon grew slower in its rounds, and Mr. Elphinstone, looking up, beheld a large silent tear on its way to join the bread-and-milk.

"My child, what is the matter?" he exclaimed in dismay. "Is it too hot?"

The Comte de Flavigny produced a handkerchief, not too clean. "I think," he said falteringly, "that I want Papa to-night."

"My poor lamb!" murmured the old man. "I wish to God that I could give him to you. See now, my bairn, if you were to bring your bowl here and sit on Grandpapa's knee?" He held out his arms, and the small boy slipped from his chair, went to him, and, climbing to his lap, wept a little silently, while his bread-and-milk steamed neglected on the table, and the deep frilled muslin collar round his neck was crumpled, unregarded, against Mr. Elphinstone's breast.

"I wish I could go to France and see Papa!" said Anne-Hilarion presently.

"My lamb!" repeated Mr. Elphinstone, his cheek pressed against his grandson's head. He did not think it necessary to combat this aspiration.

"If M. le Chevalier were here he could find him, Grandpapa. M. le Chevalier is so clever at finding people, is he not?"

"Yes, indeed," assented the old man. "But you know, Anne, that M. le Chevalier too is fighting for the King over there." And he did not explain that, so far as he knew, it was hardly a question of 'finding' the Marquis de Flavigny.

Anne-Hilarion gave a great sigh. "Perhaps M. le Chevalier will come back with Papa," he suggested. "And I can show him my new goldfish."

"And your memoirs, my bairn, with all the pictures you have made of him!"

"Yes," agreed the artist. "But, Grandpapa, when *will* they come back?"

They! Mr. Elphinstone seemed to see a tall figure standing by the door, with a face full of grief—alone. Of the two men who shared, in different degrees, this child's heart, one might return, but it would not be the better loved. Why had he this conviction about René, if not to prepare him for the reality? He made a great effort over himself, and said, "They will come back when it pleases God to send them, my child. Now eat up your bread-and-milk."

Anne raised a doubtful face. "Perhaps," he objected, "it will not please God for a very long time."

"If He sends Papa back in the end, we should not mind waiting even a very long time, should we?"

"No-o-o," said the little boy, still dubiously. He got down from his grandfather's knee, and went slowly back to the table. Yet, as he gained his chair, by a means peculiar to himself, he murmured again, "But I *should* like to see Papa soon."

And, with his eyes fixed on some vision of his own, he resumed operations on the contents of his bowl, now somewhat cooled by time and tears.

(2)

It was not till next day that Anne-Hilarion, sitting on the window-seat of his nursery, revolving anew the question of seeing his father, hit upon the idea of consulting M. de Soucy. For M. de Soucy, lame, as always, from the wound he had received at Thionville when he fought in the army of the Princes three

years ago, had not been able to join the expedition, and he was still in his lodgings in Golden Square eking out a living by teaching music. And it appeared to Anne that M. de Soucy, who had seemed so disappointed at having to remain behind, might be induced to go, privately as it were, and to take him, Anne-Hilarion, with him—not, of course, to fight, but merely to see Papa. They might even see M. le Chevalier as well. . . . Having already travelled on the Continent, Anne felt that the actual journey presented few difficulties; but it would, he supposed, cost money, and the Vicomte de Soucy, ruined by the Revolution, was very poor. Grandpapa said so, and indeed M. de Soucy himself, always with a laugh. But if he, Anne-Hilarion, proposed such an expedition, it was surely his duty to defray its cost. Could he do this? He had, in his money-box, a crown piece which would not go through the hole in the lid, and which Grandpapa had introduced by means less legitimate, means which had revealed the presence of many other coins in the receptacle. There might be as much as a guinea there by this time. This wealth was not exactly accessible to Anne-Hilarion, since he could not open the repository, but if he went to interview M. de Soucy he could take the box with him, and doubtless M. le Vicomte would unfasten it.

The preliminary step was certainly to consult M. de Soucy. But how was he to do that? How was he to get to Golden Square without the escort of Elspeth or of Baptiste? Elspeth in particular had, as he knew only too well, a wary eye and a watchful disposition. He looked at her now, as she sat not far from him mending a little tear in his coat, with so meditative an air that Mrs. Saunders asked him what he was thinking of—and was no wiser when he replied, truthfully enough, "M. le Vicomte de Soucy." Yet before he returned to his contemplation of the Duke of Cumberland's equestrian statue in the Square, Anne-Hilarion had come to the conclusion that the

only way to evade Elspeth was to call in celestial intervention.

Little, however, did Elspeth Saunders, that staunch Calvinist, imagine, as she impatiently surveyed the child at his 'Popish exercises' that evening, what it was which caused their unusual prolongation, nor what forces were being invoked against her. Little did she realise to what heavenly interposition was due, at least to Anne-Hilarion's thinking, the fact that next afternoon, at half-past one precisely, she slipped on the stairs and twisted her ankle rather severely, so that she had to be conveyed to her room and Baptiste despatched to fetch the doctor. M. le Comte had not in his orisons specified the hour of the miracle—nor, of course, the form that it should take—but he was on the alert. Mr. Elphinstone was nowhere about, so his grandson slipped into the library, and penned, not without labour, the following note:

"DEAR GRANDPAPA,—I think to go to France with M. le Vte. de Soucy, if God permits and there is mony suffisant in my box, to see Papa. I will not be gone for long dere Grandpapa. I love you alwaies."

He stood upon a chair and put this communication on the library mantelpiece; then, clutching his money-box, he struggled successfully with the front door, and set out towards the hackney coaches standing for hire on the other side of the Square.

(3)

Anne-Hilarion met no dragons on his adventurous way—which, after all, was very short. The hackney-coachman—who may have had qualms about accepting so immature a passenger—was most agreeable, and willingly agreed to wait, on arrival at Golden Square, in case he should be wanted again. The only obstacle

to progress was the purely physical barrier of a stout and slatternly woman who, at that unusual hour, was washing down the dingy staircase, and whom Anne-Hilarion was obliged to ask to let him pass.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated she, turning in clumsy surprise. "And what are you doing here by yourself, my little gentleman?"

"I have come to see M. le Vicomte de Soucy," answered Anne-Hilarion. "He is above, is he not?"

"The French gentleman? Yes, he is. I'll go first, dearie; mind the pail, now. To come alone—I never did! And who shall I say?"

"The Comte de Flavigny," responded the little boy, with due gravity.

Strange to say, M. de Soucy, in his attic room, did not hear the announcement, nor even the shutting of the door. He was sitting at a table, with his back to the visitor, his head propped between his hands, a letter open before him. There was that in his attitude which gave Anne-Hilarion pause; but he finally advanced, and said in his clear little voice:

"M. le Vicomte!"

The émigré started, removed his hands, and turned round. "Grand Dieu, c'est toi, Anne!"

His worn face looked, thought Anne-Hilarion, as if he had been crying—if grown-up people ever did cry, about which he sometimes speculated. But he was too well bred to remark on this, and he merely said, in his native tongue, "I have come to ask you, M. le Vicomte, to take me to France to see my Papa."

M. de Soucy, putting his hand to his throat, stared at him a moment. Then he seemed to swallow something, and said, "I am afraid I cannot do that, my child."

Anne-Hilarion knew that grown-up people do not always fall in at once with your ideas, and he was prepared for a little opposition.

"Your health is perhaps not re-established?" he suggested politely (for he was master of longer words

in French than in English). He did not like to refer to M. le Vicomte's lameness in so many words. But M. le Vicomte made a gesture signifying that his health was of no account, so Anne-Hilarion proceeded.

" I have brought my money-box," he said, with a very ingratiating smile, and, giving his treasury a shake, he laid it on the table at the Vicomte's elbow. " I do not know how much is in it. Will you open it for me ? "

M. de Soucy snatched up the letter that was lying before him, got up from his chair, and limped to the window. He stood as if he were looking out over the chimney-pots, but as he had put his hand over his eyes he could not, thought Anne-Hilarion, have seen very much. And gradually it began to dawn upon the little boy that the Vicomte must be offended. He remembered having heard Grandpapa once say how impossible it was to offer to assist him with money, and he felt very hot all over. Had he, in merely mentioning the money-box, done something dreadful ?

But M. de Soucy suddenly swung round from the window. His face was as white as paper.

" Anne," he said, in a queer voice, " money will not bring you to see your father. He . . . my God, I can't tell him. . . . Come here, child. Bring your money-box ! "

Anne obeyed.

" First, we must see whether there is enough in it, must we not ? It costs a great deal of money to go to France, and, as you know, I am poor."

" I think there is a great deal, but a great deal, in it," said Anne reassuringly, shaking his bank. " Will you not open it and see, M. le Vicomte ? "

" Yes, I will open it," replied M. de Soucy. " And if there is enough, we will go to France. But if there is not enough, Anne—and I fear that there may not be—we cannot go. Will you abide by my decision ? "

"Foi de Flavigny," promised the child gravely, giving him his hand.

How wonderful are grown-up people! M. le Vicomte had the strong-box open in no time. Together they counted its contents.

"Seventeen shillings and fourpence—no, fivepence, announced M. de Soucy. "I am afraid, Anne . . ."

M. le Comte drew a long breath. The muscles pulled at the corners of his mouth.

"It is not enough?" he inquired rather quaveringly.

"Not nearly. Anne, you are a soldier's son, and you must learn to bear disappointment—worse things perhaps. We cannot help your father in that way." Again M. de Soucy struggled with something in his speech. "I do not know, Anne, how we can help him."

It was, fortunately, not given to the Comte de Flavigny to read his friend's mind, but he perceived sufficiently from his manner that something was not right. He reflected a moment, and then, remembering the celestial intervention of the afternoon, said:

"Perhaps I had better ask la Très-Sainte Vierge to take care of him. I do ask her every day, but I mean especially."

"You could ask her," said de Soucy, bitter pain in his eyes.

"You have no picture of our Lady, no statue?"

"Not one."

"It does not matter," said the little boy. "Elspeth sometimes takes away my image of her too. They do not know her over here, but that," he added, with his courteous desire to excuse, "is because she is French. . . . M. le Vicomte, I think that after all I had better ask St. Michel, because he is a soldier. It would be more fitting for him, do you not think? Yes, I will pray St. Michel to take great care of my Papa, and then I shall not mind that the money is not enough and that I cannot go to France to see him."

So, standing where he was, his eyes tight shut, he besought the leader of the heavenly cohorts to that end, concluding politely if mysteriously, " Perhaps I ought to thank you about Elspeth."

" I had better go back to Grandpapa ? " he then suggested.

M. de Soucy nodded. " I will come with you," he said.

(4)

Anne-Hilarion had been gone for so short a time that he had not even been missed, for the domestics were still occupied about Elspeth's accident, and Mr. Elphinstone, though returned to the library, had not found the farewell letter. The only surprise, therefore, which the old gentleman showed was that his grandson should be accompanied by M. de Soucy. He got up from a drawing of one of the gates of Delhi that he was making for his memoirs, and welcomed the intruders.

" Anne has been paying me a visit," said the Frenchman. " He wanted to go to France again, but I have persuaded him to put it off for a little. Can I have a word alone with you, sir ? "

" Did you not get my letter, Grandpapa ? " broke in Anne-Hilarion, clinging to Mr. Elphinstone's hand. " I left it on the mantelpiece, behind the little heathen god. I did not run away, foi de gentilhomme ! "

" Send him out of the room ! " signalled the emigré. But Anne-Hilarion, having perceived his grandfather's occupation, was now in great spirits. " Let me look at the livre des Indes, Grandpapa ! " he exclaimed. " I so much love the pictures. Faites-moi voir les éléphants ! " And he jumped up and down, holding on to the arm of his grandfather's chair.

But the old man had followed M. de Soucy to the window.

"What is it, Monsieur?" he whispered. "Bad news from France?"

"Read this," said the Vicomte, thrusting the letter into his hands. "It could hardly be worse. D'Hervilly attacked the Republican position at Ste. Barbe five days ago, and was beaten off with frightful loss. God knows what has happened by now, what has happened to René—the worst, I have small doubt. . . ."

Mr. Elphinstone unfolded the letter with shaking hands. But ere he had got to the bottom of the first page, Anne-Hilarion was at his side, pulling at his sleeve.

"Grandpapa, I want to tell you a secret!"

"In a moment, child," said Mr. Elphinstone, his eyes on the letter.

"But it is very important," persisted Anne. "It is about Papa—at least it is about Elspeth."

For once he was not to be put off. The old man yielded.

"Well, my bairn?"

"I want to whisper," said Anne.

So his grandfather bent down and received the following revelation, "I prayed to my ange gardien about Elspeth."

"To make her better, do you mean?"

"No—it was before she fell down—to make her let me go and see M. de Soucy."

"Well?" said Mr. Elphinstone, still more perplexed.

"Eh bien, he arranged it," said the successful petitioner, in a tone of satisfaction. "He pushed Elspeth, no doubt, that she slipped on the stairs, and so I was able to go. I did not *ask* him to make her slip, Grandpapa," he hastened to add.

But still the old man did not realise whither all this was tending. The Vicomte de Soucy also, his threadbare coat showing very greenish in the strong light near the window, was looking at the little boy with puzzled, unhappy eyes.

"So now," proceeded Anne, "since I have asked St. Michel himself to take care of Papa—did I not, M. le Vicomte?—he will be quite safe, and I do not want any more to go to France. That is the secret, Grandpapa—and when you have finished reading that letter will you show me the elephants?"

"If Elspeth can be disposed of by the heavenly powers, even the Blues are not beyond their control—is that it?" observed M. de Soucy with a grating laugh, half to Mr. Elphinstone and half to the child. "Good God, if only one could believe it!"

As Anne, his mind at ease, climbed up into his grandfather's chair by the table with a view to the elephants, Mr. Elphinstone finished and let fall the letter, his apple cheeks gone grey. Then he turned without a word to the window and stood there, his back to the room, while into the silence came, with a strange little effect of calamity, the sound of a scud of summer rain beating against the glass.

(5)

And the rain was falling steadily on the white sand of Quiberon Bay also, on the low dunes, on Hoche's triumphant grenadiers, on the little fort, now abandoned, on the useless English ships, and on the upturned face of René de Flavigny, who lay, wrapped in a cloak, a short stone's cast from the rising tide. All about him were the evidences of the great disaster, but he had never heeded them, lying where the two soldiers had left him, by a little spur of rock that had its extremity in the sea. It had proved impossible to get him off to a boat; there was no chance for an unconscious man when even good swimmers perished. So his bearers had laid him down by the rock; he was no worse off than hundreds of others, and neither the cries of the drowning nor the boom of the English cannon had wakened him.

But now he had drifted back to pain, and the thirst of the stricken, and the numbing remembrance of catastrophe. He had tried to raise his head, but desisted from the distress of the effort. The fingers of his left hand ploughed idly into the sand. As it dribbled through them, white as lime, he remembered everything. . . . His eyes, so like Anne-Hilarion's, darkened. Since there was no one to make an end of him, he would do it himself, not so much to ease the pain and to hasten an otherwise lingering death as because everything was lost. And he would go to Jeannette.

Yet his senses were playing him tricks again. One moment he was here, a piece of driftwood in the great wreck; the next, he was kneeling by Anne-Hilarion's bed, going again through that dreadful parting, promising that he would soon return, and the boy was clinging to him, swallowing his sobs. He could hear them now, blent with the plunge of the tide. He could not keep that promise. Better end it all, and go to Jeannette.

René thrust down a hand, tugged a pistol out of his belt, cocked it, and put it to his head.

But ere the cold rim touched his temple, sky and sea had gone black. Flashes of radiance shot through the humming darkness, steadying at last to a wide sunflower of light, and then . . . he saw distinctly Anne-Hilarion's terrified face, his little outstretched hands. His own sank powerless to the sand, and he was swept out again on the flood of unconsciousness.

(6)

"Not a single blessed patrol, by gad!" thought Mr. Francis Tollemache to himself. "That means they have got at the port wine and beer we landed at Fort Penthièvre; trust the sans-culottes for scenting it out! But, O gemini, what luck for us!"

For Mr. Tollemache was at that moment—midnight—steering a small boat along the shore of Quiberon. On his one hand were the lights of the English squadron, still in the bay; on the other, the Republican camp-fires among the sandhills. The files of Royalist prisoners had started hours ago on their march up the peninsula, but Sir John Warren was still hoping to pick up a fugitive or two under cover of darkness, and Mr. Tollemache's was not the only boat employed on this errand of mercy. But it was emphatically the most daring; nor had Sir John the least idea that Mr. Tollemache was hazarding his own, a midshipman's, and half a dozen other lives in the search for one particular Royalist. Mr. Tollemache, indeed, never intended that he should have.

A rescued Frenchman sat already in the sternsheets—the sergeant of du Dresnay, picked up earlier in the day, who had helped to carry de Flavigny down the beach. Truth to tell, Mr. Tollemache had smuggled him into the boat as a guide, for the task of finding the wounded man in the dark would otherwise have been hopeless. But the sergeant could direct them to the little rock by which his officer had been laid, and, rocks being uncommon on that long sandy shore, he did so direct them. Unfortunately, since Mr. Tollemache, no expert in tongues, could not always follow his meaning, they had not yet found it. Already, indeed, had they made hopefully for some dark object at the water's edge, only to ascertain that it was a dead horse, and Mr. Tollemache's flowers of speech at the discovery had not withered till the body of a drowned Royalist slid and bumped along the boat's side. But meanwhile, even though the shore was unguarded, it was getting momentarily more difficult to see, the tide was rising once again, the men were becoming impatient. After all, it *was* rather like looking for the proverbial needle.

The French soldier tugged suddenly at the English-

man's arm. "V'là, m'sieur!" he whispered. "There is the place—that is the rock!"

The young lieutenant peered through the gloom, gave a curt order or two, and then, lifted on the swell, the *Pomone's* boat greeted the sand of Quiberon Bay. Another moment, and Englishman and Frenchman had found what they sought. But only Mr. Dibdin's special maritime cherub averted the discharge of the cocked pistol which the Marquis de Flavigny still grasped in a senseless hand, and which Mr. Tollemache had some difficulty in disengaging before they got him into the boat.

The middy, now in charge of the tiller, desired, as they pulled away, to be informed why his superior officer had been so set on saving this particular poor devil.

"Oh, I met him once in England," replied Mr. Tollemache carelessly, and, as far as the bare statement went, quite truthfully. "Here, give me the tiller now! It makes a difference when you have actually known a man, you see."

For he was ashamed to avow the real motive power—his acquaintance, much more intimate and cogent, with a younger member of the family. At any rate, it was not a safe thing to let a midshipman know.

They were nearing the *Pomone* when the Marquis de Flavigny, his head in his compatriot's lap, began to mutter something. The middy bent down.

"The poor beggar thinks he's talking to his wife—or his sweetheart," said he, pleased at being able to recognise a word of French. "'Anne,' her name seems to be."

Mr. Tollemache, in the darkness and the sea-wind, turned away his head and smiled.

CHAPTER XXIX

Væ Victis!

(1)

All that night Fortuné de la Vireville sat in the desecrated church of St. Gildas at Auray, his back against a pillar. Hundreds of his comrades were there with him, so crowded together that it was difficult to find room to lie at length. He was fasting, as they all were, since the evening before, his wounded arm was inflamed and aching, but his thoughts were with René, stiff and stark by now, most probably, on the sandhills or the shore; with Le Goffic, helpless at St. Pierre; with his scattered and leaderless Bretons. Before his eyes, in that encumbered church, lit only by a single lamp, rushed in a stupefying panorama all the events of that long day of disaster, from his ominous waking in the early morning to the last scene in the little fort—and its aftermath. He remembered how, as the grenadiers drew up their long column of prisoners on the shore, the rain had ceased, and the sun had come out; even the wind, which had wrought them so much calamity, seemed, too late, to be abating. But by three o'clock in the afternoon, when, faint with hunger and fatigue, they arrived at Fort Penthièvre, the downpour had begun again, and it rained in torrents as they marched, for eight hours or more, towards Auray. At the head of the column walked Sombreuil, supporting the old Bishop of Dol, who, on account of his age and infirmities, had not been able to embark for the English fleet, and who, in any

case, as he said, had made the sacrifice of his life. And because, before they started, every man had given his parole not to attempt escape, they marched for all those weary hours through a strongly Royalist countryside, half of the time in the friendly darkness, with an insufficient and fatigued escort, and not one broke his word. Thus, in the dead of night, they had reached Auray, and had been huddled into its various churches.

Here in St. Gildas were massed all ages and ranks, veterans and boys, officers and private soldiers alike, and the wounded, of whom there were not a few, lay in their rain-soaked clothes on the stone floor with no care but what their empty-handed companions could give them. Here was Gesril du Papeu, the brine scarcely dry in his hair, who had swum back again from safety to share the fate of his comrades; and Charles de Lamoignon, who had carried his wounded younger brother to a boat, himself forbearing to embark; and men with names like Salignac-Fénelon and Broglie, and the seventeen-year-old Louis de Talhouët, who had passed, a prisoner, through the estates of his own family on the way to Auray; and many another. . . .

Somewhere between three and four in the morning an émigré named de Manny, whom La Vireville had known some years previously, came past, and, finding a little vacant space by the Chouan leader, sat down, and recalled himself to his memory.

"You have been in Holland since then?" inquired Fortuné, looking at the faded sky-blue uniform with its orange cuffs. The fact was equally proclaimed by the black cockade which marked him as one of the second—Sombreuil's—contingent.

"Yes; I was—and am—in the Légion de Béon, and had the luck to escape when the Republicans massacred eighty of us as we marched out at the surrender of Bois-le-Duc. This time——" he shrugged his shoulders.

"We surrendered on terms, even if the capitulation was only verbal," said La Vireville, without much conviction. "There are plenty of witnesses to that."

"Yes," retorted de Manny; "and what are the chances of the capitulation being observed?"

La Vireville said nothing.

"There is one man who will not escape in any case," went on the lieutenant of Béon, looking towards the tombstone a little way off where Sombreuil sat talking to some of his officers. "He is exempt from the capitulation—he exempted himself. And do you know, La Vireville, that he was summoned by the English Admiralty to Portsmouth, to take command of us of the black cockade, on the very eve of his wedding day? The summons came at midnight, and he obeyed it instantly; but he was to have been married on the morrow to a lady whom he adored."

La Vireville made a sudden movement, as if his posture irked him.

"How very dramatic!" he observed drily. "Was the lady sorry or relieved, I wonder?"

De Manny looked at him, astonished at the tone, but the speaker's face was now in shadow from a neighbouring pillar.

"I understand that she was heart-broken—that they both were. But what makes you ask such a question? Have you anything against M. de Sombreuil?"

"Nothing whatever," replied the Chouan, shifting his wounded arm to a more comfortable position. "I pity him from the bottom of my heart. But the lady will marry someone else, you may be sure."

"Sombreuil will be difficult to replace, however," said de Manny meditatively, looking again at the young colonel of hussars, who had indeed every gift of mind and body to commend him both to man and woman.

La Vireville gave a smothered laugh. "Good heavens, man, have you not yet learnt that to a woman's heart no one is irreplaceable? She can

always find somebody else . . . if she have not already found him," he added, almost inaudibly. "But it is half-past three; if you will excuse me I shall try to sleep a little. And, putting his head back against the stone, he closed his eyes.

The officer of Béon studied him for a moment, in the dim light, with a curiosity which even the desperate nature of their common situation could not blunt, before he, too, settled himself to snatch a little repose.

(2)

Next morning some charitable hand threw in a little bread through the ruined windows of St. Gildas. Later, the muster-roll was called, and the officers, separated from the men, were marched to the town prison, though some eighteen hundred émigrés were drafted off to Vannes and other places.

La Vireville was among those who remained at Auray, to witness the indefatigable devotion of the women of that town to the prisoners. These cooked for them, brought them food, running the gauntlet of the pleasantries of their guards, took messages for their families, and tried—in a few cases successfully—to smuggle them out of prison. The days passed. Time was punctuated by the summons to go before the military commission, by batches of twenty, every morning and evening. Few came back. Sombreuil, the old Bishop of Dol, and twenty priests were shot at Vannes on the twenty-eighth of July, just a week after the surrender, and it was abundantly clear that the capitulation, if it had ever existed save as a tragic misunderstanding, would not be observed. It was for this that they had given their paroles, that those who from fatigue had fallen out during the march from Quiberon had voluntarily come into Auray next morning and surrendered themselves. . . . Even before trial, therefore, they all prepared for death, and since, against

all expectation, a priest was allowed them, they went to their last confessions in a little bare room at the top of the prison—the only room that could boast a chair.

One of the military commissions to try the prisoners sat over the market of Auray, that remarkable building with the great roof which La Vireville remembered well enough, having seen it when, at the head of his gars, he had helped to take the town a few short weeks before. But the other was in the little chapel of the Congrégation des Femmes, and it was here that he was tried, and condemned, as an émigré taken with arms in his hand. No reference was made by the tribunal to his exploits in the Chouannerie of Northern Brittany ; it was not necessary.

There was still a picture over the altar in the other little chapel to which he was taken, with the rest of that day's condemned, for his last night. A few mattresses, even, had been put in the sacristy, but most of the prisoners were of the mind of the old Breton gentleman, M. de Kergariou, and needed nothing save a light to pray by. Scattered about the chapel was a pathetic flotsam, the possessions of former occupants who also had spent here their last night on earth; and La Vireville, picking up a little book of prayers marked with the name of a boy of fourteen, Paul Le Vaillant de la Ferrière, a volunteer in du Dresnay, who had been wounded, like him, at Ste. Barbe, knew by it that, despite his extreme youth, he too had been sent to the slaughter.

In this little place Fortuné lay down for his last living sleep. He had no desire to meet death with bravado ; it was, he felt, more seemly to meet it with devotion, as so many had done, and were doing now. If he could not compass that he had been too long accustomed to the daily thought of it to fear it. Everything had ended for him on the morning when he broke his sword. He wished, it was true, that he could have left his mother in better circum-

stances, but before he quitted Jersey he had had the Prince de Bouillon's promise of a pension for her if he did not return. She would grieve for him, yes; but she would not have had him outlive his comrades. And she, too, would sleep soundly soon.

Poor little Anne-Hilarion! For him he was really sorry. The child loved his father so much; he would find it hard to believe that he would never see him again. (For he was certain now that René de Flavigny, even if he had survived, had never reached safety.) And there had been no chance of fulfilling his own promise; escape had never even looked his way. . . . After all, Providence had been merciful to him, just where it had seemed most merciless. . . . He had no son, and therefore no anguish of farewell.

And so, disturbed neither by thoughts of the morrow, by the low-voiced conversation of two friends near him, nor by the prayers of others, Fortuné de la Vireville slept soundly, as has happened to not a few in like circumstances.

(3)

He woke a little before four o'clock, and heard an old émigré, M. de Villavicencio, standing under one of the windows, read the prayers for the dying to two others, much younger. The old man was beginning the *Proficiscere* when the tramp of feet was heard outside. The chapel door was opened, letting in the air of the early morning; soldiers stood there with packets of cords. Just for one moment there was silence, and, in it, the rapturous song of a thrush; then M. de Villavicencio finished the prayer.

Fortuné got to his feet and tried to put some order into his attire. As he did this he cast a sudden keen glance at the captive who happened to be nearest to him, a man a good ten years younger than himself, fair-haired and slim, and pitiably nervous.

"I believe they have recently adopted the happy

plan of tying us together two and two," he said to him quietly. "Might I have the honour of being your companion?"

The young émigré was obliged to put his hand over his mouth to steady its traitorous twitching before he could reply. Then he said, out of a dry throat:

"You are very good, Monsieur, but surely there is someone else you would rather . . . die with? . . ."

The Chouan shook his head with a little smile, and as they stood side by side waiting for the soldiers to tie them together, the younger man pulled out from his breast the miniature of a girl, and showed it to him without a word.

"Believe me, it will not hurt," said La Vireville in a low voice as their turn came. "I have seen men shot by a firing-party before now. It is over so quickly that they know nothing about it." (Perhaps the youth would have the luck never to find out that this statement was not always true.) "It is nothing near so painful as being tied up like this when one is winged. —De grâce, corporal, put that cord round my right arm instead, if my friend has no objection!"

The two changed places, and La Vireville restored his wounded arm to the sling. Before the cord was knotted the officer in charge of the party began to read out the names. Every man answered to his own.

"La Vireville, Fortuné."

"Present."

The officer looked up from the list. "You are not to go with this batch. Why the devil have you tied him up, corporal?"

"*Not to . . . not to go . . .*" stammered La Vireville, thinking he must be already dead—and dreaming. "It must be a mistake—you are confusing me with someone else!"

"Untie him!" said the officer briefly, offering no explanation; and the corporal, grumbling a little, obeyed.

"This is horrible!" said La Vireville to his comrade,

a comrade no longer. "Dieu, why did I answer to my name! If I had had the least idea, you should have answered instead."

"You are wanted to give somebody else the courage you have given me," answered the young man with an attempt at a smile. "You permit, Monsieur?" And he kissed him.

A little later—it was still not much after sunrise—they were marched off, two and two, through the quiet streets of the little town towards the red meadow, the 'martyrs' field,' without him, and he sat alone in the deserted chapel, stunned, emptied of any conscious feeling, even of relief. And later still he heard, over the mile or so of distance, the volley which told him that they had reached their journey's end. Fortuné de la Vireville bowed his head and prayed for their souls as he had never prayed for his own—as he would not have prayed, perhaps, had he shared that volley.

CHAPTER XXX

ATROPOS

LA VIREVILLE reprieved was much less composed than La Vireville condemned. For about half an hour, it is true, he sat motionless on the steps of the desecrated altar in the little chapel-prison, a prey to the most acute feeling of loneliness he had ever known in his life. The place was so horribly empty now that it was unbearable. But after a while he rose and began to walk up and down. The harvest of relics which he had seen last night was this morning a little more plentiful, but most of this morning's victims had taken their last precious things with them to the place of death. That young man, his erstwhile comrade, with the miniature—who had that now? he wondered, —how had he, in the end, been able to face the levelled muskets? . . .

As Fortuné paced to and fro, he naturally came before long to the thought of escape. He had promised to try. . . . But a very cursory survey of the improvised jail, with its windows high up in the wall, quite out of reach, convinced him of its efficiency in that respect. And, Royalist in sentiment though the people of Auray were, had he succeeded in breaking out he would hardly find safety by broad daylight in its streets full of soldiers. These things needed some previous arrangement. It wanted someone ready to receive and hide him, someone to—yes, parbleu, someone to gallop up with a horse, unlock the door, and then . . . For his mind, by no very subtle ways, had leapt back to the captive of Porhoët, reversing

the part he had played in that episode of deliverance. Now was the time for Mme. de Guéfontaine to appear and save him in her turn. It was, alas! a most unlikely consummation. Away in Guernsey, no doubt, she was quietly mending her brother Henri's uniform. But she would have made the attempt, had she been here; of that he was sure.

La Vireville sat down once more on the altar steps, and leant his head against the chipped and discoloured plaster rail upborne by its short, stout columns. Two instincts were beginning now to torment him, hunger and curiosity, and neither could he satisfy. From whatever angle he looked at the postponement of his fate—for he never judged it to be more than that—he was baffled. *He* had no friend in the ranks of the foe. The only thing that occurred to him was that, since his appearance before them, his judges had discovered his identity with that sought-for chief, Augustin of Kerdronan, and wished to question him further—a nuisance, if it were so, and a proceeding likely to be of advantage to neither party. He profoundly wished, however, that something would happen.

Yet he was half dozing against the rail when, about nine o'clock, he heard a key thrust into the chapel door, and beheld the entrance of a grizzled sergeant of grenadiers, with a couple of soldiers behind him. Others were visible in the sunlight outside. Fortuné got up and stretched himself.

"What the devil is the meaning of this, I should like to know?" he inquired. "Is the Citizen Hoche desirous of offering me a post under him? It is lost labour on his part; I shall not take it."

"It is orders, neither more nor less," replied the sergeant briefly. "All I know is—yes, you had better tie him up—that you are not going to join the others to-day. Afterwards, perhaps—I don't know. At present I am to take you to a house in the town."

And so, with his wrists lashed together behind his

back—a posture which secretly caused him not a little pain—La Vireville set off in the midst of his escort. This could hardly mean release, still less escape. Besides, except that a natural revulsion had left him a little doubtful as to what he really did wish, he was not sure that his desire was towards release if he could have it. But why this house in the town, and who—or what—could be awaiting him there?

In Auray streets, where he had twice fought, and which were full this morning of sunshine and bright air, and of peasants with baskets, leading cows or driving pigs (for it was market-day), La Vireville was looked at with curiosity and pity. Probably, he thought, recognising the fact, because he was a solitary prisoner in the middle of his guards. They were used to batches at a time now in Auray. . . . And, passing once again by the Halles, he met the glance, brimming with a beautiful compassion, of a young countrywoman in a wonderful wide coif, who held a child in her arms. Indifferent though he was to his own fate, Fortuné felt that look like a benediction, and he wished that he could have kissed her hand. All he could do was to smile at the child, who was waving a small delighted arm to the soldiers.

Auray is a little town, and it was not long before the guard halted in front of a house taller than its elder neighbours, having a passionless female head in the Græco-Roman style and a frieze of acanthus leaves above the door. La Vireville particularly noticed them. In the large well-furnished room on the first floor, looking out on to the street, to which he was conducted, was a silver-haired old lady seated in an arm-chair, reading, whom he noticed with even more particularity. It was Mme. de Chaulnes.

He was hardly astonished, in a sense. After all, it was ridiculous to suppose that his escort would have conducted him to anything agreeable. But he could not conceive what she wanted with him.

On their entry Mme. de Chaulnes looked up, closing the book over her finger, for all the world like a woman suffering a trivial interruption which she also intends shall be brief.

"You can remove your men, sergeant," she said calmly. "I have a moment or two's private business with this gentleman, and I do not doubt the security of your knots."

The soldier had presumably no fears on that point either, and in another instant the former antagonists were alone. La Vireville had no difficulty in recalling their last meeting. Now he was a beaten man, wounded and fettered, but he stood before her very composedly, and waited. He had to wait some time, too, while Mme. de Chaulnes studied him. But there was no vulgar triumph visible in her look.

"You are wondering," she said at last, "why I have had you brought here?"

La Vireville assented.

"You are possibly thinking, Monsieur Augustin, that I am about to heap coals of fire on your head by putting the means of escape within your reach, like other charitable ladies of this place?"

"I am sorry if it disappoints you, Madame," returned the captive politely, "but that is the last idea that I should entertain."

"Or to offer you your life on terms, then?"

"They would undoubtedly be terms that I could not accept."

Mme. de Chaulnes smiled slightly, and laid down her book on a little table near her. "That is a good thing, then, for indeed I have no terms to offer to a person of your integrity, Monsieur. Though, if I had, perhaps you might find them tempting for the sake of the little boy—now, I presume, fatherless—for whom you once risked that life so successfully."

The émigré was silent.

"You are right to give me no answer," went on the old lady, "for really I have no proposition of any

kind to make to you. I merely wish to ask you a question, which you will not, I think, find it inconsistent with your honour to answer. But I cannot force you to give me a reply, nor (as you see) do I seek to bribe you into doing so."

"I will answer your question if it be in my power, Madame," said La Vireville, outwardly unmoved and secretly curious.

"Thank you, Monsieur. It is merely this—did you, or did you not, bribe my agent Duchâtel when you took the child from him at Abbeville?"

"No," replied the Chouan on the instant, "most certainly I did not. The only intercourse of any moment that passed between us was a blow."

"Ah," said Mme. de Chaulnes, with an air, real or fictitious, of relief, "that interests me very much. I am greatly indebted to you for your frankness, Monsieur Augustin. Since you can have no motive in protecting Duchâtel—rather the reverse—I believe you unreservedly. He is a useful tool, but there have been moments when I was tempted to consider that transaction at Abbeville a farce. I am glad to learn, on the best authority, that it was not." And taking up a tablet that hung at her waist she scribbled something on it with a silver pencil.

"And it was in order to discover this," broke out the prisoner in spite of himself, "that you were barbarous enough to have me reprieved at the last moment, to——" He pulled himself up, for he had no wish to exhibit his emotions to this woman.

Mme. de Chaulnes finished writing. "And you would really have preferred to go with the rest this morning?" she asked.

La Vireville bowed. "Your occupation, Madame, has very naturally blunted your perception of what a French gentleman would prefer."

"On the contrary," retorted Mme. de Chaulnes, sitting up in her chair, her old eyes flashing, "it has greatly enlightened me as to his preferences. It has

taught me that he considers it consistent with that honour of which he talks so much, to make war on his native land for the sake of his own class, and for a discredited dynasty—you see that I place these in the order in which they appeal to him—and that for his own ends he will not scruple even to call in the assistance of his country's enemies, the Prussians, and her hereditary foe of foes, England."

La Vireville shrugged his shoulders (thereby causing himself a violent twinge of pain). "On that point, Madame, we shall never agree. In return for the question I have answered, may I now ask one of you? . . . How do you reconcile your own position as a French gentlewoman with—the use to which you put it?"

Mme. de Chaulnes' smile was insolent. "Quite easily, Monsieur. I fight for my country—at the cost, I grant you, of my class; you, for your class, that degenerate, self-seeking class, at the expense of your country. To me it seems the more patriotic course to sacrifice the part to the whole, whatever it may cost one personally. I had a nephew in this morning's batch, but I would not have saved him if I could. Yes, it is rotten, this aristocracy of ours, and the sooner France is purged of it the better."

That smile had maddened La Vireville. She was a woman, and his hands were tied behind him, but he still had the means of striking. "Ah yes," he said, in his most careless voice. "And when your misguided father was shot by order of Montcalm for his treachery during the siege of Quebec, you approved even then, no doubt, of the process of purgation, and applauded its beginning. He also, if I have heard rightly, had the same fancy for the assistance of the English against his own country."

Not a muscle of Mme. de Chaulnes' face had quivered, but its faint colour had faded to grey, and La Vireville saw the small knotted hands in her lap gripping each

other till the knuckles stood out white. And he was pleased.

"You think, Monsieur, that this forty years' old story is the reason for my present actions? It is not, I assure you." And, seeing the smile on his face, she added with more warmth, "No, you would never understand that a woman could have conviction, apart from personal animus, in a matter of this sort."

"You misjudge me, Madame," retorted the Chouan. "I am quite sure that Delilah, for instance, had convictions of the same kind. No doubt your unfortunate father had them too when he invited the English into Quebec. One may say, in fact, that it was a sort of family conviction that upheld you in your spider's web at Canterbury. But if the blood of those you have betrayed could speak, I think it would cry out less against a renegade who acted from revenge, than against one who made a trade of treachery from 'conviction'!"

Light and intentionally wounding as his tone had been at the beginning of this brief speech, a passion of loathing had slipped into it by the end. A flush crept into the grey old face opposite him, and the blue eyes hardened. But, a condemned man, La Vireville knew himself beyond any vengeance of hers. She could not touch him now.

"If our not very fruitful conversation is at an end, Madame . . ." he suggested.

There was a little bell on the table near her, and to this she put out a still shaking hand. But before she rang it she showed herself not unconscious of his thought.

"You owe me something, Monsieur, for your triumph over me in the matter of the child. I dare say you think that since this is to be your last day on earth you have paid me that debt. You are wrong." She rang the bell. "You have not paid it yet!"

As his guards took La Vireville away he saw that

she had returned to her book, but one hand was pulling at the lace round her wasted throat, and she looked very old. He flattered himself that he had contributed something towards that effect of age.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PAYING OF THE SCORE

(I)

QUIBERON once more, place of intolerable memories, that Fortuné had thought never to see again, and the sea, blue and sparkling, breaking idly on the white sand that a few days had sufficed to wash clean of blood and tears.

It was thus that it had greeted La Vireville's eyes this afternoon, at the end of the long and dusty march back along that *via dolorosa* from Auray. For when he left Mme. de Chaulnes' presence he was included in a draft that was being taken back to Quiberon to be tried by a commission there. It was in vain that La Vireville had protested that he had already been judged and condemned—that he had, in fact, a right to be shot at Auray. It was useless, and he had to go.

He found himself this evening herded for the night, with these fresh comrades marked for death, in a stone-walled field, with a sentry at every ten paces outside. They were to appear before the commission next morning. Most of them had in their pockets a hunch of bread, but the long hot march had made them very thirsty, and water was hard to come by. La Vireville contrived to procure some, and shared it with a grey-haired émigré of Loyal-Emigrant from Poitou.

"To our last night on earth!" said the old man tranquilly as he took it, and thanked him.

"I have already had one 'last night,'" replied

the Chouan, with rather a wry smile. "I did not expect another. But at least it is under the stars this time."

He settled himself under the lee of a wall to sleep. The stars indeed were very bright, save just near the moon. In the silence he could hear the surf breaking on the rocks of the western shore. He was tired, but he did not sleep as he had slept last night at Auray, after his condemnation. This place was too bitterly full of memories. One in particular, that of his lost friend, haunted him, and he recalled his promise to him here, where it was made—the promise he could not have kept, the promise he did not even want to keep, for he had no wish to live now. But for Mme. de Chaulnes he would be sleeping at this moment with the others, in the meadow at Auray. And yet his fury at her cruelty had died already into ashes, for she had given him this night under the stars, a night like many he had passed among the broom with his men . . . a whole lifetime ago. . . .

That he should have recognised this for a boon, and felt thankful for it, might have told Fortuné de la Vireville that the unquenchable instinct of life was not really dead in him, though he thought it was. But he was not given to self-analysis. This only he was aware of, as he lay there, that whereas at Auray he had been genuinely resigned to his fate, and would hardly have looked at the chance of escape if it had been offered to him (save perhaps for Anne's sake), now some obscure process of the mind, in stirring up a profound annoyance at the way in which he had been treated by Mme. de Chaulnes, had also stirred up the desire to live, and cheat her of her vengeance. Only now there appeared no means of putting that desire into practice.

And had Providence been as merciful as he had thought? Ah, if after all he had had a son—if he were not going down into the dust, leaving no trace and no memorial behind him! But that thought brought him face to face with the tragedy of his life.

He flung his arm over his eyes, and so lay, motionless, a long time. . . The stars moved on; the sea-wind swept, sighing, over the prone figures which would lie yet more still to-morrow, and at last La Vireville, rousing himself, came back to the present.

Should he try to save himself, this time, at his trial? There was just a chance of doing so if, as was probable, the tribunal had not the minutes of the court at Auray. Could he gull his judges with some story of his being just a Breton peasant, as his dress, or at least the chief part of it, proclaimed him? They were showing more mercy to the Chouans than to their leaders. He could take off his high boots and go barefoot, leave here in the field his sling which, though no longer white, had obviously once been a leader's scarf, untie his hair once more and wear it loose on his shoulders. Among so many, his guards would hardly notice the transformation, and his judges would not have seen him before. Was it worth trying?

Yes, for the sake of the promise to the dead, for Anne-Hilarion's sake, and because, at thirty-five, it is not easy to be twice resigned.

(2)

The military commission began its work at eight next morning. La Vireville, appearing before it at about half-past eleven, found it to consist of a captain of artillery, a sous-lieutenant and a corporal of sharpshooters, and a sergeant, under the presidency of a chef de bataillon.

It was very soon evident that this commission, as he had hoped, had no record of the proceedings of its fellow at Auray. La Vireville's statement that he was a peasant of the Morbihan passed practically unchallenged, helped by the changes he had made in his appearance and by the Bas-Breton with which he interlarded his replies. How then had he come to be

taken at Quiberon? Why, because when Hoche had driven in the Chouans from their positions on the mainland, quantities of the peaceable peasants there as his interrogators knew, had fled to the peninsula with their families. Indeed, warming to his work as he went on, as once before on a less serious occasion at St. Valéry, here in the little bare room in Quiberon village, with his life at stake, Fortuné began in his own mind to invest his supposed family with many likely attributes, and went so far as to tell the commission that one of his brothers had been drowned in trying, most foolishly, to escape to the English fleet.

So he had not borne arms against the Republic? Ma Doué, certainly not! Nothing was further from his thoughts; he was a peaceable cultivator, and only wanted to be left alone to cultivate. He had never emigrated? Dame, no! Why should he leave his family, his parish, and his recteur?

The commission conferred together. The chef de bataillon seemed to be studying some paper in front of him, glancing off now and again to look at La Vireville very keenly from under his grey eyebrows.

"You have never been in North Brittany then?"

No; he had never in his life left the Morbihan.

"Then you do not know Erquy and Pléneuf?"

Not if those places were in North Brittany. For his part, he did not know where they were.

"Then," inquired the president suavely, "you have never met or even heard of the North Breton Chouan leader called Augustin?"

And in that moment, as La Vireville realised that he was lost, he realised also what Mme. de Chaulnes had meant when she said that the score was yet to pay. This was her real vengeance.

But he made a fight for it. "How could I possibly say that, mon commandant?" he asked, with an air of puzzled innocence. "I do not wish to tell a lie. I may have seen him here at Quiberon. Is that what you mean?"

The president laughed, not unappreciatively. "I suggest to the prisoner that he can indeed see Augustin at Quiberon this very moment, if he will be at the trouble of looking in a mirror."

La Vireville assumed the most bovine air of stupidity at his command, and shook his head. "I do not understand," he answered.

"I think you understand only too well, Monsieur Augustin, otherwise La Vireville," said the chef de bataillon sternly. "Courtois, oblige me by reading out the description of the Chouan Augustin."

The sous-lieutenant read it out slowly and clearly—a damning document enough, not the old incorrect Government 'signalement,' but the one, drawn from the life, which Mlle. Angèle had penned that evening at Canterbury.

"The scar on the left cheek—put back that long hair of his!"

The wheel had come full circle. What he had had to submit to, in order to save Anne-Hilarion, months ago, had proved fatal to him himself now, as he had always known it would some day. Well, Anne could live without him.

"I do not think," observed the president, folding up the paper in front of him, "that there is anything more to say. Take him away. The next, sergeant!"

So La Vireville lost the throw, for the dice were loaded against him. He had no doubt that Mme. de Chaulnes had sent the 'signalement' down with him to Quiberon, and that the president had been ordered to keep it back till the last moment, as he had done, so that he could delude himself that after all he was going to escape. She had a pretty taste in vengeance, that old woman!

(3)

At half-past nine that night seventy of them were marched out to die. It was a beautiful and serene

evening, light enough to slay by. Over the quiet waves the just risen moon made a wide golden highway. They went four abreast along the sandy track till they came, among the barley-fields at the edge of the sea, to a stony, uncultivated meadow with a fringe of wind-sloped and stunted trees behind one of its encircling stone walls. There they were halted and their sentences read to them, and after that stationed, thirty at a time, a few paces apart, against this low barrier. To each was told off a firing-party of four. La Vireville had been speculating how it would be done ; at Auray he had heard that they had arranged otherwise. He himself was placed among the first thirty, the last but one of the line.

He had shaken hands with his right-hand neighbour, the Poitevin from Loyal-Emigrant, and was turning to the one remaining victim on his left, when his own four soldiers closed upon him. One of them drew out a handkerchief to bandage his eyes. Fortuné did not think it worth protesting that he should prefer not to be blindfolded, and submitted without a word to the operation. Another man held his unbound wrists, but La Vireville had no intention of struggling, though all the time he was thinking, " If I had a chance, even now, I would take it—were it only to spite that she-devil ! " The handkerchief smelt strongly of brandy.

" Citizen," suddenly said a husky voice in his ear, and he felt the rough hands still fumbling behind his head with the knot of the handkerchief, which he was sure was already tied—" Citizen, we are very sorry, but it is the law. So if you have any money about you, give it to me now ! "

La Vireville gave a laugh. Could they not be at the trouble of searching him afterwards ?

" I have several louis left, as it happens," he said, " but it would not be fair to give them all to you, my friend. If I am to pay for the privilege of being shot . . . ! Shall I throw them to you all ? "

"*No!*" said the first applicant, with emphasis. "No, divide them now!" cried two of the others; but this altercation on the brink of the grave was broken into by an angry order from the officer commanding the party: "You there at the end, get to your places instantly!" And the hands, unwillingly, left Fortuné alone in the darkness, on the bank of the same river whose fording he had tried to make easier for that unfortunate young man at Auray yesterday morning. For himself, he had always known and expected that he would end like this, with his back to a wall and a firing-party in front of him; the only feeling which remained, now that the moment had actually come, was a hope for accurate aim.

Down the line in front of him he heard the click of cocking hammers. The voice of the old Poitevin a little way off on his right began, firm and clear, to repeat a response from the Burial Mass: "*Libera me, Domine, de morte eterna, in die illa. . . .*" The man on his left was murmuring over and over again a woman's name. . . . All that Fortuné himself thought was, "They might as well have it, the rascals, if I can get it out in time!" He thrust his right hand into his breeches pocket.

"*Apprêtez armes!*" shouted the officer.

And La Vireville, drawing out his hand full of gold pieces, threw the money from him with a gesture half-tolerant, half-contemptuous.

But all that he had played for and lost, much that he remembered, much that he had forgotten, surged like a tumultuous mist before him, in those two or three seconds that he folded his arms on his breast and waited for the final order. . . .

"*Feu!*"

In Quiberon village the peasants crossed themselves at the sound of the volley.

CHAPTER XXXII

Dead Leaves

(I)

In the Square garden, behind the statue of Butcher Cumberland, the leaves fell early that year. Anne-Hilarion, Comte de Flavigny, playing under their fading splendour, daily collected those he most esteemed, and bore them indoors to hoard in a rosewood box, lined with tartan, that had once been his mother's. Alas, like many other of this world's treasures, these precious things proved very evanescent. Either they fell to pieces, so brittle was their beauty, or else Mrs. Saunders, declaring that she would not have a rubbish heap in her nursery, threw them implacably away.

Those were rather sorrowful days altogether in Cavendish Square. It had seemed at first, when August was beginning, that Anne's father had been snatched by a British naval officer's pertinacity from that shore of death in the Morbihan only to die in England. And the Chevalier de la Vireville, like so many others, had never come back at all. . . . Ere August was over M. de Flavigny, it is true, was out of danger; now, by mid-October, he was mending fast. But he was very sad; and of M. le Chevalier no one ever spoke to Anne-Hilarion, since a certain dreadful fit of crying, occasioned by his queries about his friend —or rather, by the answers which had to be given to those queries. And all the tragedy of Quiberon, its waste of life and loyalty and devotion, lay heavy

over that London house, though no English existence or interests had suffered loss there.

All the more, therefore, did it seem good to the powers governing Anne-Hilarion's days that he should frequent the Square garden this autumn more than in previous years. And this morning he was doing so, unattended, too, since John Simms, the gardener, was there sweeping up the leaves, and the child was under engagement not to go outside the enclosure. Elspeth had therefore left him for a space to his own devices, and Anne was supremely happy, transporting fallen leaves from one side of the garden to the other, in a little painted cart indissolubly united to a horse of primitive breed. The lack of playmates did not trouble him, and indeed his experience of these had not been uniformly happy. There had been the episode of Lord Henry Gower's two little boys, who also, as dwellers in that house overlooking the garden where the Princess Amelia had used to hold her court, sometimes took their pastimes therein. To them, on one occasion,'French and English' had seemed a highly suitable game, and since Anne-Hilarion bore a Gallic name, it was quite clear what part he was to sustain. He sustained five distinct bruises also, and relations with the Masters Gower languished a little in consequence.

"A'll lairn them play *Scots* and English!" had threatened Elspeth, on discovering these evidences of realism; but the culprits never gave her the chance.

To-day, however, there was no one in the garden but John Simms and Anne himself; and John Simms, though amenable and ready to reply when addressed, never bothered him with tiresome questions, as strangers were apt to do, nor exercised an undue control over the dispositions of his game, like Elspeth. He was a person of intermittent spasms of labour, alternating with intervals of reflection, during which he scratched his head, and silently watched whatever was going forward—in this case Anne-Hilarion busily conveying

to and fro minute quantities of dead leaves, under the impression that he was helping him.

Accustomed to these periods of inaction, Anne, as he passed the clump of laurels on the other side of which John Simms was at the moment working—or meditating, as the case might be—would have paid no attention to the cessation of the sound of the broom, had he not just then heard the gardener thus deliver himself to some person or persons unknown:

"The Markis dee Flavinny, the French gentleman? Why, Mam, he lives over there, just by where Cap'n Nelson used to live. But the 'ouse ain't the Markis's, though, 'tis the old gentleman's, Mr. Elphinstone's. And as it 'appens, the Markis's little boy's here in the garden along o' me at this very minute—him with the gal's name, Master Anne."

Taking this as a summons, Anne-Hilarion at that came round the laurel bush, his horse and cart behind him, to find that John Simms' questioner was a lady in deep mourning, with a long veil.

"This 'ere's the Markis dee Flavinny's little boy, Mam."

Anne could not remove his hat, as he had been taught to do in the presence of ladies, since he was already bareheaded. "Did you wish to see my Papa, Madame?" he inquired rather diffidently. "Because he is ill. . . ."

The lady had never taken her eyes off him since he first appeared. Even through the veil, Anne thought she was very beautiful.

"I should like to talk to you a little first," she said, in a sweet voice, speaking French. "Shall we go and sit on that seat over there?"

They went over to it, and she sat down; but Anne, still a trifle doubtful, stood in front of her clutching the string of his horse.

"And what have you in your cart?" inquired the ady, putting back her veil.

"Leaves," replied the little boy. "I fetch them

15940

from *there*, and I empty them out *there*. It is to help John Simms, but it takes a long time."

A pause, and then the visitor observed, "Did you say that your father was ill, Anne?"

The child nodded. "He was wounded over there in France, at Qui—Quiberon, Madame. He has been very ill, but he is going to get better now."

"And is——" began the lady, and then seemed to change her mind about what she was going to say. "I suppose he had friends who went to Quiberon too?" she suggested.

"Yes," replied Anne. "But M. de Soucy could not go," he volunteered, and contributed the reason. The lady, however, did not appear to be in the least interested in the Vicomte de Soucy, indeed she scarcely seemed to hear. She looked as if she were seeing something a long way off.

"My child," she said at last, bringing back her gaze to him, "you remember the gentleman who fetched you back from France in the spring?"

A quiver went through Anne-Hilarion. "Oh yes," he replied.

"I must ask," said the lady to herself; "I cannot wait." She looked hungrily at the little figure with the cart, her hands gripping each other, and as Anne had averted his head she did not see how the young roses had faded from his cheeks. "Anne," she said, finding her voice with difficulty, "has he come back—the Chevalier de la Vireville?"

Anne-Hilarion shook his head, and then, collapsing on to the grass, put his curls down on the unyielding neck of his toy horse and burst into tears.

The lady covered her own face for a moment with her hands, the next, she was kneeling beside him in her black draperies. "Mon petit, don't cry so—don't, don't, you break my heart!"

But Anne sobbed on as if his own heart were breaking, till the zebra-like stripes on the little horse were all sticky with the tokens of his grief.

"Dear little boy," said the lady beseechingly, putting her arms round him. "I should not have asked you—I ought not to have mentioned him." Her own voice was by no means steady.

"He said," gulped Anne, without raising his head, "that he would be my uncle . . . in England too. But he has never come back . . . and I want him. . . ."

"Oh, Anne, so do I!" said the lady. "But don't cry so, darling! Perhaps he will come back one day. Let me wipe your face . . . look!"

"I thought you were going to say . . . that he was not killed after all," sobbed Anne.

"But we do not know, mon chéri, that he is killed, do we?" said the lady, whose own face was now much the paler of the two. "You see, Anne, he has perhaps gone back to his Chouans — to Grain d'Orge. You remember him, my child? Do you know, Anne, that I once rode on a horse behind Grain d'Orge?"

She beguiled him at last into submitting to be detached from his steed, and having his smeared countenance wiped with her fine cambric handkerchief (much pleasanter than Elspeth's towels), and finally, on the grass of the Square garden, she got him into her arms and kissed and comforted him.

(2)

All this time the broom of John Simms had been silent, and if he had heretofore stood and scratched his head and watched Anne-Hilarion at play, with how much more abandonment did he not now give himself to this occupation! So absorbed was he in the spectacle before him that he fairly jumped when he heard a fierce voice at his elbow, and perceived Mrs. Saunders, come to fetch her charge to the house, and, equally with him, amazed at what she saw.

"Wha's yon wumman?" she repeated. "What for did ye let her in here, John Simms?"

" I dunno who she is," responded he weakly. " She's furrin, that's all I know, and asked queer-like wheer the Markis dee Flavinny lived. So I tells her, and I says, ' This here's his little boy ! ' "

" Ye doited auld loon ! " ejaculated Elspeth. " 'Tis anither French witch, as A'm a sinner, come after the wean. John Simms "—she shook him by the arm—" gang till yon gate, and dinna stir frae it—she'll hae him awa gin ye dinna ! A'll sort her ! "

But though she advanced towards the unconscious little group upon the grass with that intention, she changed it en route. Glenauchtie should deal with this intruder.

" A'm gaein' for the maister," she announced, as she passed John Simms, who was slowly and reluctantly gravitating from his post of vantage to the gate, as he had been bidden. " Hasten noo, ye gaberlunzie ! "

So Mr. Elphinstone, having for once contrived a comfortable morning with his books, was disturbed by a tempestuous knock at the door, and the entrance of his highly discomposed countrywoman.

" Glenauchtie," said she breathlessly, " there's a wumman—a French body, in the garden, crackin' tae the bairn. She's gar'd him greet, and noo she's at rockin' him in her arrms. A'm thinkin' she'll be anither o' they deils frae Canterbury. Come awa quick, sir ! "

" Dear, dear ! " exclaimed her master, catching her alarm. " Fetch me my hat,—'tis in the hall,—and let us go at once ! "

" There's Grandpapa," said Anne, detaching himself from the warm and consolatory embrace. The lady rose from her knees as Mr. Elphinstone, closely followed by Elspeth, came hurrying towards them over the grass. But when he saw her Mr. Elphinstone mitigated his haste. She was not, somehow, what Mrs. Saunders had led him to expect.

" Madame ? " he began, removing his hat.

" You are Mr. Elphinstone, Monsieur ? " asked the

lady, stumbling a little over the difficult, only once-heard name. "Forgive me that I have made acquaintance with your grandson before waiting upon you, Monsieur. I came in here to ask the gardener the number of your house. Forgive me, too, that I have made the little boy to cry."

Despite the consciousness of Elspeth, breathing out slaughter behind him, Mr. Elphinstone felt calm. This was some émigré's widow, perhaps (unaccustomed to the depth of French mourning, he would never have imagined it assumed for a brother) but she had certainly not come to beg financial assistance. Her air, even more than her dress, assured him of that. As to spiriting away the child——

"In what can I be of service to you, Madame?" he inquired.

"I came to ask news of someone," replied the stranger. "But"—she looked a moment at Anne—"I have had my answer."

"Come awa', Maister Anne!" whispered Elspeth, gesticulating from behind.

Mr. Elphinstone began to understand. "Yes, go with Elspeth, my bairn," he said. And Anne-Hilarion went, first saluting the hand of the lady, who thereafter bent and kissed him, and watched him as he departed.

"Madame, will you not come into the house?" suggested Anne's grandfather.

She shook her head with a little sigh. "Thank you, no, Monsieur. I will not detain you a moment. You can tell me what I want to know only too quickly, I fear."

"It is about the Chevalier de la Vireville?" queried Mr. Elphinstone.

She bowed her head without answering.

A look of pain came over Glenauchtie's ruddy features. "Madame," he said, "it is best to be frank with you. We have no news of him since that fatal day of the surrender—no certain news, that is. We have

made every inquiry in our power. My son-in-law was his friend, as you may have heard, and he was severely wounded at Quiberon. As it happens, almost the last thing he remembers is bidding a hasty farewell to M. de la Vireville, who was then with the retreating troops. He himself knew nothing more till he found himself that night on board the English frigate, one of whose boats had rescued him. We fear the worst now on M. de la Vireville's count, and it is a great grief to us. We owed him much, my son-in-law and I. In fact," finished Mr. Elphinstone not very steadily, "we owe him *that*!" He indicated the departing figure of Anne, now just disappearing with Elspeth through the garden gate.

"I know," said the lady. "And I owe him much too —though we only met once. But what did you mean, Monsieur, by saying you had no 'certain' news? Have you any then that is uncertain?"

"It is so untrustworthy," said Mr. Elphinstone, hesitating, "that I would rather not tell you."

"I would rather hear it, Monsieur!"

The old man still showed reluctance. "It is only this, Madame," he said at last, "that a friend of ours, a naval officer—he, in fact, who saved my son-in-law—met an émigré who said that he had seen M. de la Vireville's name in a list of those who were shot at Auray or Quiberon on a certain date in August. But indeed, Madame, that is not evidence—still less so because this officer's informant affirmed that he had seen the name in both lists—which is surely impossible."

"I thank you, Monsieur," said the lady, putting down her long veil. "I had not really any hope. You will pardon me for having troubled you? Your son-in-law will, I trust, soon be restored to health. I am glad I have seen the little boy."

She was extraordinarily calm, the old man thought. He went with her to the gate. For one moment, forgetting that she had confessed to having only once

seen him, he wondered whether she had been La Vireville's wife.

"May I know your name, Madame?" he asked, as he bowed over her hand.

"The Comtesse de Guéfontaine," said she, and was gone.

René de Flavigny, lying wearily in his mahogany fourposter, was a little reproachful when he heard of this visit, showing, in fact, some of the petulance of the convalescent. He asked why his father-in-law had not brought Mme. de Guéfontaine in to see him.

"I am sorry, my boy," said Mr. Elphinstone. "I thought it would be too much for you. Still, it might have been a consolation to her to talk with you."

"Not that I could have told her anything consoling," said the Marquis dismally. "Fortuné is engulfed with the rest—we shall never see him again. Did you tell her what Tollemache said?"

"Yes," said the old man, with a sigh. "She took it, I think, as conclusive. She had great self-command."

His son-in-law sighed too, a sigh of utter weariness and depression. "I wonder what she was to M. de la Vireville," said Mr. Elphinstone, pursuing his train of thought, as he stooped to mend the fire.

René started. He was back suddenly at Quiberon, on the rocks in the sunshine, in his friend's quarters by candlelight. "Bon Dieu!" he murmured to himself. "I have only once—no, twice—heard him speak of a woman," he added aloud. "Surely it cannot have been she!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MAN SHE WOULD HAVE MARRIED

(I)

So he was dead—was lying with his comrades in a hasty trench at Auray, or under the bloodstained sand of Quiberon itself. Sometimes—for she had heard that many had been drowned—Raymonde de Guéfontaine had fancied that the sea, out of which he had come to her, had claimed him again, and that his body lay forgotten on some lonely Breton beach, or swayed gently, far down, with the drift of the full Atlantic. It was not so; French soil held him, as she hoped it would hold her some day. Yet, no more than the little boy, should she look on him again.

The October sunshine seemed to hurt her eyes as she went along Oxford Street. These English people too, prosperous and indifferent, who walked the streets of their dull city without a care, with such satisfied faces, such garish-coloured clothes—she hated them! Why had not England done more, lent the full weight of her arm to that doomed enterprise? England had not shed a drop of her blood for it. There were even those who said that she was not sorry to know that so much French blood had flowed, and was glad to have rid herself so cheaply of some of her pensioners. Raymonde de Guéfontaine had too generous a nature herself to lend a ready credence to that rumour, and yet she felt that the country which sheltered her had wounded her too. For someone had told her that, to England, the main significance of the expedition which had meant so much to her and hers was that it

nad served as a diversion in favour of England's ally, Austria; and seeing how, at the end, it had been hurried forward, she did not wholly disbelieve this.

Mme. de Guéfontaine had come over to London from Guernsey, where her brother Henri was stationed, to visit an old aunt who, unlike most of her compatriots, had succeeded in saving no inconsiderable sum from the wreck of her fortunes, and was now enjoying life and society in an atmosphere perhaps greyer, but certainly less inflammable, than that of Paris. Mme. de Nantillac was fond of her niece, and, being one of those to whom bodily comfort is paramount, was set upon driving Raymonde into giving up the lodging she shared with her brother at St. Peter Port and living with her in comparative affluence in Sloane Street. She had even selected a parti for her, the most eligible of her circle. And for these reasons Mme. de Guéfontaine felt a strong repugnance towards returning immediately to her society. Instead of summoning a hackney coach she would go into this great park, and sit there a little under the trees, alone with the strange guest that had lodged all at once like a bird in her heart—grief.

She should never see him again. Now she realised that all the early summer, when she had been in Guernsey, she had felt that only a few miles of sea sundered them, were he in Brittany or in Jersey, and that perhaps some day he would fulfil his promise, and come to St. Peter Port. And then, on that day, she could try again to convince him that, once that wild moment of fury and pain and vengeance past, she had not even in will betrayed him. For it haunted her sometimes that she had not really persuaded him, though she could point to no look or word of his to prove it.

Then had come Quiberon—yet she had hoped, and hoped . . .

But now she could never plead her cause—now she could never convince him. She could never have again that moonlit vigil at L'Estournel, nor their

twilight parting above the little bay. . . . But it was only now that she really knew—only now, in this stinging, cnoking mist of pain and regret, that two things, the most simple and ordinary and terrible in the world, were made plain to her: that she loved him, and that he was dead.

And Raymonde de Guéfontaine, a Catholic, was transported in mind from the bench in Hyde Park to the little church of her faith in Guernsey, where every day she went to pray for André's soul. It was unfamiliar to her, and she always found it stiff and new-looking, with its pews and whitewash and self-complacent plaster saints. The feet of her spirit faltered now upon its threshold. No, better far to be in that little old pinnacled chapel in Finistère where she and André had knelt as children, a marvel of delicate and lovely tracery, set away from mortal haunts in a world of shining chestnut trees — the little chapel where woodland beasts and grotesques chased each other about the intricate carving of the ancient painted screen; where St. Christopher, uncouth and truly gigantic, looked across at St. Roch, whose dog no longer possessed tail or ears; where the floor was worn by generations of use, and the pillars green with damp. There, before the rude wooden Pietà, wrought centuries ago with much love if with little skill, she could have prayed indeed to the Mother who knew, if ever woman did, what loss meant. . . . And there, in spirit, she did so pray, while her bodily eyes, long exiled from that shrine, watched the fans of the alien horse-chestnuts flutter to the ground about her.

(2)

The Vicomtesse de Nantillac was stout, she wheezed when she spoke, and was sometimes besprinkled with snuff; but she had been a beauty at the court of Louis XV., and did not forget it.

" You know, child," she said that evening, as they awaited a guest in her comfortable drawing-room, which faced the fields towards Westminster, " it really is time that you were rangée. You have been in that barbarous island since the spring, and Henri might well part with you now. What further do you propose to do there—or he with you ? "

" I may find means of making myself useful," said her niece placidly. Having not the slightest intention of yielding to these attacks, she was not disturbed by their recurrence.

" You know," went on the old lady, shaking her elaborate grey curls, " M. de Pontferrand thinks——"

" But it is nothing to me what M. de Pontferrand thinks ! " interrupted Mme. de Guéfontaine with vigour.

Mme. de Nantillac turned up her eyes to heaven, then addressed a much more mundane deity, her lapdog. " Cupidon, you hear ! " she wheezed. " And as for that time in Brittany with poor André . . . Tell me, Raymonde, what did you wear there ? Did you really go about with pistols and a cartridge belt ? I said something about it to M. le Duc, and though of course he thought it was most unfitting, he vowed you must have looked like Minerva or la Grande Mademoiselle."

Mme. de Guéfontaine gave a laugh. Out of deference to her aunt's wishes, she was not wearing deep mourning this evening, and the full grey silk and abundant fichu from which her neck rose like an ivory column had about them nothing of the Amazon.

" Ma tante, the Duc would never have looked twice at me in Brittany. I wore a coarse stuff skirt, pleated into a thousand folds all round, and a peasant's embroidered bodice, and a peasant's coif. But as to settling down—no ! I must fight in some way. I cannot live at ease."

The Vicomtesse bent her large pug face forwards. " You know, my dear child," she whispered, " M. le

Duc has . . . has recovered a good deal of his money, and if you wanted to assist the cause in that way, as I am sure we all do" (she never gave a penny herself), "you would find him by no means parsimonious."

"Possibly," said Mme. de Guéfontaine, shrugging her shoulders. "But I do not want M. le Duc either as a banker or in any other capacity."

"All I can say is that you do very wrong, Raymonde," urged her aunt. "You should always think of the future. Who is going to look after you in the years to come, when Henri is married and I am gone, and perhaps the English are not as generously disposed as they are at present?"

"I do not want the charity of the English!" said Raymonde, flushing. "And as for someone to take care of me—I am not a young girl. You forget; like you, ma tante, I am a widow."

"I do not know what that has to do with it, child," retorted her fellow-bereaved. "Even I sometimes, not so young as I was, feel . . ." She left her sensations of unprotectedness to the imagination. "Let me implore you to think about it seriously. If you are determined not to have the Duc (I am certain he is going to ask you, and probably this evening), you might even marry an Englishman. You are so odd, who knows?—it might be a success! There are English officers of family in Guernsey, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," returned Raymonde indifferently.

"My dear child, if they were there you must have seen them, in six months. I have met English officers, quite proper men. You have not taken a vow against marrying again, I imagine?"

"Not that I remember."

"Of course I know—your first marriage, your husband was somewhat old for you. And on that score, perhaps, M. le Duc . . ."

"The man I would marry," began Mme. de Guéfontaine suddenly, looking down and pleating the silken folds of her gown, "would not be like M. le Duc in any

way. He would be lean and sinewy and agile. He would not be rich, but he would have a mouth that held always a shade of mockery, and he would do the most unexpected things with an air of being amused by them, from befooling a Republican official to saving the life of a woman who had tried to kill him."

"You are describing some man you know," said Mme de Nantillac, with a certain measure of excitement. "Cela se voit. Who is it? And who was the woman?"

Raymonde de Guéfontaine checked herself. The light which had been in her downcast eyes was extinguished. "Oh no, ma tante. My portrait has no original . . . *now*," she added inaudibly, and, turning away, she began to rearrange the flowers at her breast, just one minute before M. le Duc de Pontferrand, with his smile and his smooth, portly, debonair presence, was announced.

That night she revisited Porhoët in her dreams. The tide was up, the moon was full, and from her little cottage, as she stood on the sand and looked up at it, shone a light. She went up the path, lifted the latch, and entered; and sitting at the table, breaking bread together, were the two who had never met in life—André, pale and smiling, with the fatal bullet wound in his forehead, and . . . the Chevalier de la Vireville. They both rose as she came in, and held out their glasses towards her, and as La Vireville moved she saw the blood run through the fingers of the hand which he held pressed against his side.

She stretched out her arms towards the two phantoms with a great cry—"Mes morts!" and with that woke, and lay sobbing.

A week later she was on her way back to Guernsey —Guernsey, whence she could sometimes see the coast of that France for which they both had died.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MONSEIGNEUR'S GUEST

(1)

UP and down the Hard at Portsmouth, among rough sailors and rough language, but apparently unconscious of either, there walked in the last days of November 1795 a little old man in the dress of a French ecclesiastic, absorbed in a book. Such sights were not very infrequent now in the southern ports, and if they aroused occasional comment, it was not of a hostile nature. This old priest was small, frail, and a little shabby, but of a very unaffected dignity, and on one finger shone an amethyst ring.

"Monseigneur does choose such extraordinary places to say his office in!" thought a younger and taller priest, making his way through the throng to the old man. "One knows, of course, that it is all the same to him wherever he is."

He approached his compatriot and addressed him with deference. For the shabby little ecclesiastic was the exiled bishop of one of the most important dioceses in France.

"It is as Your Grandeur thought. The corvette is from Houat, and she has on board a dozen or so of our unfortunate fellow-countrymen from Quiberon. They are sending them ashore now."

The Bishop slipped the book he was reading into a bulged pocket. "Then we will go and meet them. Ah, pardon, my friend, I hope I have not hurt you?" he exclaimed, as, in turning, he collided with

a gigantic man-o'-war's man in a shiny tarpaulin hat.

The sailor pulled his forelock. "Not very likely, sir, saving your presence," he returned, with a grin. "'Twould take a vessel of more tonnage than you has to sink Tom Richards!"

"I love these good mariners!" observed the Bishop, as the two priests made their way to the edge of the quay and looked down. The corvette's boat was already there, landing her cargo of battered and broken men. So the Bishop stationed himself at the top of the steps, and as they came up he spoke to each, asking his name, where he was going, if he had need of anything.

Last of all came a tall, gaunt man in English uniform who seemed rather dazed, and was helped by two sailors up the steps. When his supporters abandoned him he sat down on a bollard and put his right hand over his eyes. His left sleeve hung empty.

Perceiving his condition the Bishop did not address him directly, but applied for information about him to the lieutenant of the régiment de Rohan with whom he had last been conversing.

"No one at Houat knew exactly who he was, Monseigneur," replied the French officer, glancing over his shoulder. "He was found half-dead on the rocks there as long ago as August, and he was ill for months afterwards from wounds and exposure. Neither then nor since has he been able to give much account of himself—he seems to have lost his memory—though from the few rags remaining on him when he was discovered it was supposed that he had been one of the Chouan leaders."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said the Bishop. He went over, with compassion in his face, to the seated man, and touched him on the shoulder.

"My son," he said, "is there anything that I can do for you?"

"This is St. Helier, is it not?" answered the other

in a dulled voice, without looking up. " If you could kindly take me to where my mother lives. I . . . I have been ill . . . and I do not think I could find the way."

The Bishop paused a moment, then he said, very gently, " This is not Jersey, my child; it is Portsmouth."

" Portsmouth," repeated the émigré, in the same uninterested tone. " Not Jersey—Portsmouth. But she is not at Portsmouth——" Then he looked up, and his eyes, full of fever though they were, knew the man who was speaking to him for a bishop of his own Church.

" But they shot you at Vannes, Monseigneur, with Sombreuil ! "

The old man guessed to whom he was referring. " God rest his soul ! " he said, signing himself. " But you mistake, my son; I am not the Bishop of Dol, and this is England. What are you going to do ? "

The Frenchman got to his feet. " I ? " he said, and laughed a little. " Why, I should have been shot at Auray, Monseigneur . . . or at Quiberon. . . . It would have been better. . . . But I am here. . . . God knows why." He sat down again on the bollard.

Monseigneur beckoned to his Grand Vicar. Then he turned again to the émigré. " My son," he said, " you will come home with me. It is not far. Come, take my arm ! "

And the émigré obediently took that ridiculous support (the Grand Vicar, however, walking in readiness on the other side) and so came, with difficulty and without speech, to the little hired house where the Bishop lived.

In the parlour Monseigneur said to him, " And now perhaps you had better tell us your name ? "

" Augustin," replied the guest, and, turning suddenly faint or giddy with the word, collapsed like a log against the Grand Vicar, who, being fortunately

nearly as tall as he, and robust to boot, was not felled to the floor as the Bishop would undoubtedly have been.

(2)

The good Bishop sat all that night by the bedside of his guest, and all night long La Vireville tossed and talked, so that, being undeterred by his occasional lapses into language of a vigour which would have shocked the Grand Vicar, the Bishop learnt many things. The empty left sleeve indicated, as he had of course supposed, that the émigré had lost his arm—or most of it, for it had been amputated some way above the elbow. That wound was healed, but his whole body still bore the marks of what the sea and the rocks between them had done to it, and it was to one of these injuries, to the head, that the surgeon summoned next morning was inclined to attribute his sudden lapse into insensibility and his present state of semi-stupor.

"He was not really fit to have made the voyage from Houat," he said in conclusion; "but from what one hears of conditions in the Ile d'Yeu he is certainly better in England." He was thinking of the privations which, since the end of September, General Doyle's little force had been undergoing in the latter island.

When the surgeon had gone the old Bishop said to his Grand Vicar, with his customary gentle resolution, "We must try to find our guest's mother in Jersey, of whom he spoke on the quay yesterday."

"But we do not know his surname, Monseigneur," objected the younger priest, "unless by any chance 'Augustin' is his family and not his Christian name. And there are so many French exiles in Jersey."

"His mother evidently lives at St. Helier," replied the Bishop, "and that gives us something to start from. I shall write to the Prince de Bouillon and

ask him to make inquiries. . . . Also I shall have M. Augustin moved into my bedroom. He will be more comfortable there, and if, as I suspect, he is going to be ill for some time, it is a sunny room, which is important."

As the Grand Vicar and the housekeeper alike knew that it was of no use arguing with Monseigneur, especially when his own discomfort was in question, they did not waste their energies in conflict, and La Vireville, still only half-conscious, was transferred to the modest episcopal apartment.

(3)

The volleys that rang out that August evening over the Bay of Quiberon had left one man out of the doomed thirty untouched by any bullet—preserved as by a miracle. The miracle was wrought by greed, and the man—as may be guessed—was Fortuné de la Vireville.

Fortuné had realised the incredible thing quickly enough. Dazed though he was by the ear-splitting general discharge at such close quarters, he had no sooner perceived that he was still on his feet, unharmed, than he had torn off the bandage round his eyes, taken one glance at the scene through the drifting smoke, and with a single bound had cleared the low stone wall behind him. Even as he jumped, however, came a report, and his left, his already injured, arm fell powerless to his side. He staggered a moment with the shock, recovered himself, plunged through the little thicket of dwarfed trees, and in another minute was running like a deer across the pale barley-field beyond. He was saved—for the time at least—by a chance the possibility of which had never entered his head. At the moment of the command to fire, his executioners had been stooping after the gold which he had just thrown to them. . . . One man only, he who had just winged him, was bringing his musket

to the level as the émigré had snatched the handkerchief from his eyes and turned. Now, as he ran, the barley catching at his bare feet, the rest of the belated volley and some other shots came after him. But they went wide; the light, at that distance, was too uncertain. La Vireville tore on.

Yet that one marksman had scored heavily enough, as was soon only too obvious to the fugitive. His left elbow was shattered, and—what for the moment was worse—the injury was bleeding very copiously. La Vireville supported it with his other hand and arm as he raced through the barley, but he knew that between the severity of the pain, which the rapid motion was momentarily intensifying to agony, and the hæmorrhage, he would not be able to run much farther. And indeed there was not much farther for him to run, since beyond the field was nothing but the shore. That solved the question, anyhow. With forty others to despatch, too, there was just a chance that they would not pursue him immediately.

So, where the edge of the barley-field curved gently over to the beach, he scrambled down, panting and dizzy, and fell to his knees on the soft sand. One thing he knew to be imperative—to stop the blood pouring from his arm, and in a kind of frenzy he tore off the bandage from his former, half-healed wound and tied it tightly above and around the new. This proceeding, necessary though it was, put the coping-stone on his endurance, and it was barely finished before he toppled forward on to his face and lay there motionless. Dimly, as consciousness left him, he heard the sound of the second series of volleys.

He came to—how much later he had small idea—with sand in his mouth and an almost intolerable aching in his fractured elbow. Whether the soldiers had searched for him or no he could not tell. He hardly realised that, except from the beach itself, he was invisible where he lay. But he did not conceive

that there was any permanent shelter for him on Quiberon. Looking stupidly at his arm, he saw that the bleeding had stopped, but the arm was much worse than useless, for it was anguish to move it in any direction. . . . Really the simplest plan was to stay where he was. The soldiers would find him in time, and could finish their work; on the whole, it was foolishness not to have stayed up there by the wall to let them do it. . . . And Fortuné lay down again, with relief, on the fine and kindly sand that had already drunk his blood and now offered him oblivion.

For though he had said to himself a little while ago that if he had a chance he would take it, and though he had leapt the wall instinctively, and had run as never before in his life, yet now, after all, his will faltered. For one thing, he was sick with pain; for another, he was badly crippled. And what inducements had he, he asked himself, to wrestle further with destiny?—for a fight it would be, and most probably a losing one. Anne-Hilarion, to whom he now owed a duty; his mother, whom he loved; the cause he followed? Yes; but to none of these was he indispensable. That dark star of his, which for ten years had represented love to him, certainly offered him no light to live by; nor did revenge, since St. Four was dead. All he asked for was to yield, to contend no more.

But in a few moments he had struggled up again on to his elbow. The naturally unsubmissive bent of his mind worked automatically against such a surrender, and the remembrance of his promise to René came back even stronger than it had done last night. He had pledged himself to do his best to escape; René's last words to him—possibly the last he had ever spoken—had been on that matter. But how was he to fulfil that promise?

Leaning thus on his right elbow, La Vireville studied the sand, that strangely white sand of Quiberon. How *could* he save himself—it was practically impossible now! Under his gaze, covered with half-dried blood

from the shattered arm which it had supported in his flight, lay his right hand, and that was all he had to depend on. Slowly and awkwardly enough (and even then at the cost of what made him set his teeth) he raised himself a little higher. And as he propped himself on this sound but bloodstained hand, he was suddenly aware of a minor pang in that. Glancing down again he saw that in changing his position he had brushed it against a plant of sea-holly, of which there were many on the shore and the dunes of Quiberon.

And La Vireville stared at that sturdy thistle, with its sharp, glaucous leaves and its beautiful dream-blue flower, both misty now in the dim light, almost as if he saw it in a dream, for its harsh touch had carried him back in a flash to the little bay in the Côtes-du-Nord where all this, surely, had happened before—where, when he was crippled, that same hand had known the scratch of the sea-holly, even to blood, and Mme. de Guéfontaine's kiss.

"She would not like to kiss that hand now!" he reflected, rather grimly. Yet suddenly he had the impression, as vivid as if she were there now, kneeling by him, near the sea-holly, as she had knelt that evening in the northern bay, that she, with her high courage and her ideals of devotion, would never counsel him to lie here like a coward till he was found and shot. She would have counselled him—did indeed seem to be counselling him now—to bestir himself, for the child's sake, for his own self-respect. But how was he to obey her?

There was only one way—the way she had gone that evening. The waves to-night broke not much less gently on this shore of tragedy than they had done on that placid strand. Yes, there lay, as always of late in Fortuné's life, the call. But it had never been so hard to follow. Nevertheless he believed the English squadron to be cruising somewhere off the little isles of Houat and Hoedic, and the former of these could not be more than ten miles away. If

Providence would but complete the miracle and put him in the way of coming by a boat—a possible but an unlikely occurrence—he would take it for an omen, and make an attempt to reach the fleet.

And so, supporting his mangled arm again with the other, he began to get with difficulty to his feet, reflecting as he did so that even if there were a boat on the shore he could not launch it, injured as he was, and that in any case, if he showed himself near it, he would probably be fired on by some unseen sentry. Luckily the moon was near her setting. He must therefore look for this problematical boat before she set, but not attempt to embark till afterwards, when it would be much darker.

Directly he was on his feet, La Vireville became aware of a black blotch on the waters of the bay, a little to his left, and a few yards from shore. He stood there staring at it, utterly unbelieving. Was this the answer of Providence? Two fantastic thoughts immediately visited him: the first, that she, with whom he had almost seemed, a moment ago, to hold converse, had known that the boat was there; the second, that Anne-Hilarion must really need him. It was quite a small boat, yet, as far as he could see by straining his eyes in the moonlight, it had a mast ready stepped—a vital point, since he must have a sail. Then he tried to calculate the distance of the boat from the edge of the water, because he thought it very unlikely that in his present condition he could swim out to her. If the tide were ebbing, however, he might possibly reach her by wading.

"I shall be taking the deuce of a deal of trouble for you, Anne," he said out loud, "and I expect it will come to the same thing in the end—a volley at ten paces." But he sat down again to wait for the moon's setting, his back against the bank of sand that was the edge of the barley-field, trying to keep his hot thoughts off the great pain that he was suffering, wishing that he had not made away with his sling, and

facing the more than probability that the fresh injury would in the end be his undoing.

Twelve hours later, shivering with fever under a hot noon sun, he was lying becalmed somewhere to the east of Houat. He had almost lost his sense of direction, and in any case there was no wind. The oars he naturally could not use. He had eaten nothing since the day before, he was very thirsty, he had been soaked to the skin in getting to the boat, and his wounded arm was causing him such a martyrdom that if he could have cut it off and thrown it overboard he would willingly have done so. Half the time Anne-Hilarion seemed to be sitting beside him, asking why they did not sail faster, and once, at least, he answered him very seriously, "Because, mon petit, your uncle has such extraordinary bad luck,"—to which Anne had contended that it was good luck, not bad, or that it might at least be regarded as mixed. And then the fugitive found himself saying something about the devil's own luck, and a voice replied, "André had that kind of luck too, but it failed him in the end." Who was André? Was he in the boat too? If he were, then perhaps his sister was with him, and perhaps she could do something for this terrible pain which was driving him crazy—as once she had with her cool fingers eased his foot. . . .

And Fortuné raised his throbbing head from the gunwale to look for her—but he was quite alone in the boat, and the boat was alone, motionless, in the midst of a shining sea. How the sun stared at him—and yet he was so cold! His head fell back again inert, and he returned once more to the vision of that tragic line of fallen, writhing figures, an ineffaceable glimpse of which his senses had caught and recorded as he leapt the wall.

Later still, as daylight faded, the little boat, lifting sideways with every long shoreward wave, her sails racketing madly about, drifted nearer and nearer

to the iron rocks of Houat, where the surf was always pounding. The wished-for wind had sprung up just at sunset, but the helmsman, lying face upwards in the sternsheets, much as François the fisherman had once lain, was in no condition to utilise it, or even to avert the disaster to which it was hurrying him.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—It is a matter of historical fact that one émigré did escape shooting at Quiberon by throwing his gold to the firing-party, exactly as described.

CHAPTER XXXV

Mr. Tollemache as a Linguist

(I)

The full-rigged ship, in oils, embedded in a solid sea of the same medium resembling a newly ploughed ultramarine field, which hung over the chest of drawers in the Bishop's bedroom (he having taken the little house furnished, and feeling, with his fine courtesy, that he had no right to change the place of anything therein), perplexed La Vireville not at all. Almost his last memory had been of the sea. There was, too, a stuffed trout in a glass case which might also, with a little difference, have been a denizen of the deep. . . . But his mind, still, after ten days' care, somewhat confused, was not at all cleared by lying and gazing, as he often did, at the little triptych of the Assumption which the Bishop had succeeded in bringing away from his private chapel in France, and which hung not far from the other painting. La Vireville could not have told why, but the triptych seemed to him, as it did to the Grand Vicar, incongruous with the stuffed trout. He used to speculate how it got there.

At first he had remembered very little about Quiberon, either about the surrender or his own abortive execution, but he had a vivid, detached memory of what came after the latter event. He could recall how, just as the little boat plunged into the breakers of Houat, he had suddenly regained his senses, brought back, no doubt, from the borders of unconsciousness by the never-dying instinct of the seaman. Too late

though it was to save himself then, that instinct kept his nerveless hand on the tiller in an attempt to guide what he could no longer control. . . . He remembered the crash, the swirling, foaming water that sucked him down twice, struggling desperately, from the rock which, crippled as he was, he could neither gain nor cling to, the water that beat him against it like a cork, and that then, in a great wave, finally engulfed him, to bear him back and fling him senseless on the pebbles. He remembered, too, waking once more to a brief, semi-animate existence, to find himself lying face downwards on the wet shingle, his hair in a salt pool that seemed half blood—or was it merely tinged with the light of the red sunset that towered over Houat? Close by the surge still thundered, drenching his cold, half-naked body with spray. He was bleeding and battered from head to foot, yet, though he knew he saw death face to face at last, he contrived to drag himself up the shingle a few inches farther from the furious breakers. . . . After that, darker oblivion than before. . . .

Of his finding next morning by two of his compatriots, refugees like himself from Quiberon, in time to save his life but not his arm, he knew nothing, and most of the memories of his slow and painful struggle back to existence in that bleak, scarcely habitable islet, among the human débris of the great disaster, were confused, and—except one—in no way desirable as reminiscences.

Yet now, whether as the result of better care and conditions, or because the strain of the voyage to England had worn itself off, brain and body alike were recovering fast, and Monseigneur, very much pleased, intimated that he should shortly set up in practice as a physician. His best medicine, however, was still to come—from Jersey.

(2)

Fortuné was sound asleep when his mother at last bent over him, one frosty December afternoon, her heart brimming with mingled thankfulness and tears. For indeed the face on the pillow, always lean, had passed far beyond mere leanness now. . . . Yet here he was, her son, whom she had mourned as slain, sleeping just as he used to sleep twenty years ago, a boy at Kerdronan, with one hand under his head—no, not just as he had used to sleep, for this was not of those days, this evidence, very marked in repose, of the pitiable victory that weakness had won over vigour. He was alive, would live, but he looked broken. And achingly it went to her heart, how thin his wrist was—all she could see, at the moment, of that once strong, sunburnt hand of his. Involuntarily she looked about for the other hand. . . . And it was then, and then only, that the full realisation of what the Bishop had told her came down upon her. Under that avalanche her fortitude gave way, and sinking down on the chair by the bedside she hid her face in her hands.

The slight movement had wakened the sleeper, and he opened his eyes, and lay a few seconds looking at her, without stirring. He had known that she was coming.

"What are you crying for, petite mère?" he said at last, in his changed voice. "Are you so sorry, then, to see me again?"

"Oh, my son, my son!" she cried.

. . . . . .

"You know about this?" he asked abruptly, after a little, indicating his left arm.

Mme. de la Vireville nodded, unable, for all her courage, to trust herself to speak for a moment.

"I shall have a hook," went on Fortuné, with a faint smile. "Like old Yves, the ferryman at Coatquen,

when I was a boy. . . . Do you remember? He always said that he could do more with it than with a hand. . . . I used to envy him that hook. And I should never have had an elbow again, you know."

Mme. de la Vireville swallowed something in her throat. "Since Monseigneur told me," she said, sufficiently firmly, "I have not ceased to thank God that it is your left arm."

"I also," replied her son, with an effort. "And for Monseigneur's charity, and now, for your coming, my heart. . . . Sit close to the bed, and I shall sleep again."

(3)

Several times during the next two or three weeks did the Grand Vicar congratulate the Bishop on having sent for Mme. de la Vireville. There was no room for her in the little house, but she lodged near, and spent all her days at her son's bedside. That son no longer looked quite so much like the wreck of his former hardy self, and, but for the fact that his memory still played him obstinate tricks over names, he had regained his normal mental condition. But he seemed to his mother to have something on his mind. One day, half in jest, she taxed him with it.

He looked at her from his pillows with a smile.

"If I had a mind, little mother, there might be something on it. Even my head is not as hard as I have been accustomed to boast, for either that confounded bullet last spring, or the rocks of Houat, have played the deuce with the inside of it."

"But, my son, you are daily recovering your memory," said Mme. de la Vireville encouragingly.

"Yes," agreed Fortuné, "and one thing I remember is this—that I promised poor René de Flavigny to look after Anne if he were killed. And I am convinced that he was killed."

His mother looked at his gaunt visage and hollow eyes.

"Fortuné, you are scarcely in a fit state to look after anyone at present, you must admit that. And as to the fate of M. de Flavigny, surely that could be ascertained by inquiry?"

"Doubtless, if I had not entirely forgotten his address in London, and even the name of his father-in-law with whom he lived. I have tried times without number to remember it," said La Vireville, frowning. "It was a square, and there was a statue of a general on horseback in it. . . . Perhaps Monseigneur would know?"

As the Bishop, however, had not once set foot in London he was not of much topographical assistance.

But now, having elicited what her son had on his mind, Mme. de la Vireville soon perceived what edifices he was ready to build on the subject of Anne-Hilarion's bereavement. Anne should come and stay with them in Jersey when his grandfather could spare him; Anne should do this, that, and the other. . . . She could not doubt the stimulus it was to Fortuné to feel that Anne would have a real claim on him, and he on the boy. He had long ago made up his mind that the Marquis could not have survived, and though his death caused him real sorrow, so many friends and acquaintances had come to violent ends since '89 that there was little sensation of shock about the loss.

Fortuné did not tell his mother, for fear of wounding her, that, but for Anne and his own promise to René he might possibly never have tried to escape that night, but she was not far from guessing it. It would have needed a miracle to enable her to guess that the thought of another person had also counted for something in that episode—and this fact he was still further from revealing to her.

(4)

The required information about M. de Flavigny was supplied, in the end, from a quite unexpected source. For, walking down High Street one morning, Mme. de la Vireville saw two British naval officers in front of her. One of the backs seemed familiar. So, rather shamefacedly, she hurried after it, and breathed behind it an apologetic, "De grâce, Monsieur!"

Mr. Francis Tollemache checked, looked over his shoulder, stopped altogether, turned round, and saluted. His companion did the same.

"At your service, Madame," he responded. "Madame de la Vireville, I believe?"

"Oui, M. le Lieutenant," said she, a little breathlessly. "Et si Monsieur voudrait, il pourrait me rendre un grand, un très grand service!"

The ready colour suffused M. le Lieutenant's ingenuous countenance. He turned to his comrade. "Could you take her on, Carleton?" he asked.

Mr. Carleton shook his head. "Don't know a word of the lingo," he replied unhelpfully.

Mme. de la Vireville saw what was wrong. She pulled herself together for an effort. "You do not speak French, Messieurs, is it not? Eh bien, it is that my son is very ill, and he want to know if the little boy Anne de Flavigny—no, if *ze fazzer* of the little boy is . . . vivant . . . or kill'. Il le croit mort . . . and he have forgot"—she touched her forehead—"where he live in Londres. Cela le tracasse tant! You per'aps know it, Messieurs?"

"Le petit garçon—oh, hang it! Madame, vous comprendre un peu anglais, don't you? The little boy lives with his grandfather, Mr. Elphinstone, in Cavendish Square, but his father—père, isn't it—ain't killed." Thus Mr. Tollemache, in the same bilingual style.

" Mais . . . my son, he was sure . . ."

" I've the best of reasons for knowing that de Flavigny is alive," said Mr. Tollemache stoutly, casting the French tongue momentarily to the winds. " I went to see them all last week, and he's getting on famously—can walk now. Porter bien . . . marcher . . . vous comprendre, Madame ? "

" Tollemache here saved his life," put in Mr. Carleton. " Pulled him out of that affair under the very noses of the sans-culottes. A deuced fine piece of work." But this information was couched in language too idiomatic for Mme. de la Vireville's comprehension.

" M. de Flavigny n'est pas mort, alors ? " said she, the conversation being evidently about to end in each party speaking his own tongue.

" Non, pas mort," responded Mr. Tollemache. " Jolly as a sandboy—at least he will be. So's the little 'un. And the address is Cavendish Square. Shall I write it down . . . er . . . écrivez pour vous, Madame ? "

" Ah, M. le Lieutenant, if you could come to see my son a little five minute, to tell him about M. de Flavigny ! Cela lui ferait tant de bien ! " said Mme. de la Vireville, turning the wistful battery of her eyes on the young officer. And he capitulated unconditionally.

(5)

La Vireville was sitting that day, wrapped in a flowered dressing-gown, in the little bow window of the bedroom. It was promotion for him, yet Mr. Tollemache gave an exclamation when he entered.

" By gad, you look as if you had been through a good deal ! " he said, and then saw the empty sleeve, and was dumb.

La Vireville stretched out his hand to him. " You behold in me, M. le Lieutenant," he observed, with rather a grim smile, " a twice condemned criminal.

I have no right to be anywhere but underground. But what is the news you have to tell me, Monsieur?"

Mr. Tollemache sat down beside him and told him. The wounded man heard him through to the end without comment, his face shielded by the thin hand on which he leant it. At the end he said under his breath, "Thank God!" and held out that hand again to the narrator. "You are a brave man, Mr. Tollemache."

But the sailor, not a very keen observer, was struck by the added pallor which had come over the already haggard face during his brief recital, and which he assigned to the well-known emotional nature of the French, manifested as readily, apparently, at the hearing of good news as of bad. Besides, the poor devil looked very weak. Mr. Tollemache was sorry about that arm.

"Well, my son," said little Mme. de la Vireville, coming in with a smile a few minutes after the visitor had gone. "Did not our guest bring excellent news, both for you and for the little boy?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the invalid. "René's escape was nearly as miraculous as mine. And," he added slowly, "a miracle to more purpose."

There was something so unusual in his voice that she stood with all her gladness—that was mostly for his sake—turning cold.

"Anne will not come and stay with us in Jersey now," said Fortuné, looking out of the window. "There will be no need; thank God again for that."

Was it as strong as that then? Something that was half-hope, half-anguish, leapt up in Mme. de la Vireville's heart. She knelt down beside her son's chair, and looked at his averted profile.

"Fortuné," she began, in a voice that shook, "if only you could put that . . . memory . . . away! My dear, my dear, what is the use of keeping it all these

years? You have only to stretch out your hand to grasp what you want. . . ."

"What is it that I want?" asked her son, turning his head and looking at her. He was even paler than Mr. Tollemache had seen him. "There is nothing left for a cripple and a failure like me to want, except rest, and you, ma mère. I have both—too much, God knows, of the first—but of you I can never have too much. There is nothing else that I need." He bent his head and kissed her.

But from the day of the good news which Mr. Tollemache had brought him, he began perceptibly to go downhill again.

He was always, on the surface, his old jesting, courageous, disillusioned self, but underneath was a listlessness which Mme. de la Vireville had never known in him. It terrified her. He had previously looked forward to walking a little with her in the garden one day; now it was enough for him to sit apathetically in the window. Sometimes he seemed to have neither strength nor inclination even for that. The surgeon talked, as he had talked before, of the effects of suffering and exposure on an exceptionally strong and vigorous constitution; the Bishop said to the Grand Vicar that he thought it was something that came very near to being a broken heart—broken, like so much else, at Quiberon; and Mme. de la Vireville, despairing, bewildered, and sometimes even a little wounded, carried her knowledge of the past like a heap of ashes amid her slowly dying hopes for the future. Had Fortuné, who had recked so little of blows and hardships and disappointments, come through so much to end like this?

CHAPTER XXXVI

ANNE-HILARION MAKES A PLAN, AND THE BISHOP A REVELATION

(I)

"ALWAYS elephants," observed the Comte de Flavigny with interest, holding up the little brass bowl of Indian workmanship which contained the sugar. "Always elephants—and monkeys!"

"The Baba-sahib is spilling it," whispered Lal Khan, bending his turbaned head to the little boy's level, the while he tendered the tray with the coffee-cups to his master.

He had just brought the coffee into the library, and it pleased the Baba-sahib, who had accompanied him, to offer the sugar to the two gentlemen. He was, however, dressed for out-of-doors.

"You are going for a walk, Anne?" asked his father, as he helped himself. He was lying back in a great chair on one side of the fire. A wonderful January sun shone in upon Mr. Elphinstone's books.

"Yes, Papa, with Baptiste. I am going to buy a new money-box, because since M. de Soucy opened my old one for me in the summer—when I thought to go to France—it has sometimes come open of itself."

"Very unsatisfactory for a thrifty bairn," observed Mr. Elphinstone, who was sitting on the other side of the fire with a pile of manuscript on his knee. "Then you will transfer your money, I suppose, from the old to the new box?"

"What is 'transfer'?" inquired Anne. "Oh, I

understand. No, Grandpapa," and he shook his head mysteriously. "I am going to spend it."

"Dear me!" said his grandfather. "And on what, pray?"

"Well, first I thought," said Anne-Hilarion, "that I would give all the money in my money-box to M. le Lieutenant Tollemache for saving Papa, for since M. Tollemache is not poor, like M. de Soucy, it is permitted to offer him money—is it not? But Papa said . . . What was it you said, Papa?"

The Marquis smiled at his small and earnest son, and put his arm round him. "I believe I told you to keep it for yourself, Anne."

"But *I* did not save you, Papa!" exclaimed the child, almost indignantly.

René de Flavigny's eyes sought the fire. "I would not be too sure of that," he said. "On whose account, do you suppose, Anne, did Mr. Tollemache take all that trouble and risk for me?"

"I suppose," replied the little boy, wrinkling his forehead, "for St. Michel, because I asked him very particularly to take care of you."

"Yes," repeated René, "as I say, it was you who saved me, my son. But not, perhaps, quite in the way you think," he added to himself.

There was a moment's pause, during which Anne apparently resolved not to pursue this question, for he went on with a business-like air: "I have now quite resolved what I will do with my money, which is now a great sum, with what Grandpapa gave me at Christmas. I shall not give it to M. le Lieutenant."

"Well?" queried Mr. Elphinstone, looking at him over his spectacles. "This suspense is very hard to bear, Anne."

"I shall spend it on going to Portsmouth to see M. le Chevalier."

The two men looked at each other at this announcement. "What next?" asked the Marquis, amused.

"After that I shall begin to save for the new box,"

responded his son, taking the inquiry literally. "For though to go to Portsmouth will not cost as much as going to France would have done, I expect it will quite empty the old one."

"And a very good thing too," remarked his grandfather, "if you are going to employ your savings to such ends. We have had enough, in this house, of your jaunts, my bairn."

"But it was *you*, Grandpapa, that sent me to Canterbury!" said Anne, turning an accusing gaze on the old gentleman. Mr. Elphinstone collapsed.

"True, only too true!" he murmured. "But, child, your father is going down to Portsmouth to see M. de la Vireville directly he is able to travel. He has already written to him to that effect."

"But that will be quite a long time yet, I know," returned the Comte wisely. "I heard Dr. Collins say so."

"You could write M. de la Vireville a letter," suggested his grandfather.

"But I want to see him!" repeated Anne. "One does not see a person by writing him a letter."

"This child's arguments are difficult to controvert," remarked Mr. Elphinstone to his son-in-law. "I do not see any reply to that."

"Except perhaps this," suggested the Marquis. "Are you sure, Anne, that on his side M. de la Vireville wants to see you just now? He is rather ill, you know."

Anne-Hilarion gave this due consideration. "But if I were ill, Papa, I should want to see you and Grandpapa. It would make me feel better—as when I had whooping-cough last year."

"And you think that your presence would have a similar good effect on M. de la Vireville? You are not wanting in assurance, my son!"

Anne smiled, because he knew that he was being teased, and, the clock striking at that moment, he slipped out of his father's arm. "Will you please to

think about it, Papa, while I have my walk?" he said coaxingly.

After he had gone Mr. Elphinstone turned over his manuscripts for a minute or two. Then he looked across at his son-in-law, who was staring again into the fire.

"I could take the child to Portsmouth, René, if you wish him to go—and can trust him to me," he said. "I do not know what you feel, but it seems to me that it might be some slight attempt to repay that great debt which we owe on Anne's behalf—and M. de la Vireville was so fond of the child that he might really be glad to see him."

René de Flavigny looked up and smiled. "How well you read my thoughts, sir!"

(2)

On that same remarkably sunny day in late January the old Bishop, in a long black cloak, was walking up and down the little walled garden at Portsmouth under a sky as blue as May's. The forerunners of spring had arrived, and the sight of that vanguard evidently gave him a lively pleasure. He was standing looking at the border when he heard a step, and observed Mme. de la Vireville approaching him. She had come to the house earlier in the day, but he had not seen her.

"It is almost spring already, Madame," he remarked to her. "Look at that patch of aconites!"

Mme. de la Vireville did not obey him. She came up, kissed his ring, and said with the directness of a child, "It is not spring in my heart, Monseigneur. Your Grandeur knows why."

The Bishop may have had the eyes of a mystic, but they were by no means blind to mundane affairs. He looked at her now. "Yes, I know, my daughter. I have been wishing for some time to speak with you of

this. You will not feel cold if we walk up and down a little in the sun ? "

She shook her head and turned with him. At their feet the snowdrops stood smiling and shivering behind little rows of box. " I have just come down from Fortuné's room, Monseigneur. He is no better, this morning—not so well, I think."

They took a turn in silence. " Forgive me if I am impertinent," said the Bishop, rather suddenly. " I have been wondering of late why your son has never married. How old is he—forty ? "

Mme. de la Vireville shook her head with a sad little smile. " Only thirty-five, Monseigneur. As for his marrying, I have long greatly desired it, but he will not look at a woman. He has good reason, perhaps." She hesitated, then went on. " There was one, ten years ago . . . he loved her only too well. She too seemed to love him dearly, and became his affianced wife. On the very day before their marriage she fled from her home with another man, whom she had only known for a week or two. That man was Fortuné's intimate friend."

" And then ? " asked the Bishop.

" Fortuné called him out—he could hardly do less. The scar which you may have remarked on his face, Monseigneur, is a memorial of their encounter. It is where his false friend's bullet wounded him—he can never look in a glass without seeing that reminder. They used pistols, not swords—I do not know why—and drew lots for the order of firing. And though my son, since he fired second, had this man who had so deeply injured him absolutely at his mercy, though he was half beside himself with grief and rage, he spared him, for her sake, and fired in the air."

" That was well done," said the Bishop.

Mme. de la Vireville laughed. " Was it not, Monseigneur ! It was not easily done, either, that I know. Can you guess what Fortuné's reward was ?

After a year she left this man, to whom she was not wedded, and married another."

The Bishop looked very grave. "And your son, Madame, after so bitter a betrayal, has conceived a hatred of all women?"

"Hardly that, Monseigneur. It is more hopeless even than that—for such an aversion might change. No, I am almost sure that against his will he loves her still. That is the tragedy."

"She is still living—her husband also?"

"I believe so."

"Perhaps M. de la Vireville hopes to marry her in the end, if—as may so easily happen in these sad days—she should be suddenly left a widow?"

"No, Monseigneur, he would never do that. He has never forgiven her. But he will not look at another woman. I think it would make no difference to him if he were to hear of her death to-morrow. For him she has long been dead . . . and yet she is alive. Would God she were not! Her lover was killed by his side at Quiberon; he told me the other day." She paused a moment, looking into the distance, and resumed, with a little gesture: "Do not imagine, Monseigneur, that Fortuné is always thinking of this. He is not a dreamer; he has always been a man of action, and a reckless one at that. It is but a scar now, I think, not a wound—but it is a scar with poison in it. And over there in Jersey, when I saw him with the little boy . . ." She stopped, and the tears came into her eyes. "Monseigneur, I believe that in his heart of hearts Fortuné desires as much to have a son as I desire to see him with one."

"But," said the Bishop, "there is nothing to prevent his marrying some day, if he could cut himself loose from this memory. If he could so cut himself loose, the rest—you must pardon an old man, my daughter—the rest would not be difficult, would it?"

"Monseigneur, a man who will not look at women is always attractive to them."

The Bishop smiled. "I suppose that is true. Now would you be astounded to learn that, before you came, he used sometimes, in sleep or delirium, to repeat a woman's name? I suppose it was hers who betrayed him."

"I do not think that likely, Monseigneur," said Mme. de la Vireville. "He has not mentioned her name for years. And that it should have been any other woman's is impossible."

"Then perhaps my ears deceived me," replied the Bishop, looking as if he were pretty sure that they had not. "In that case I shall perhaps not be indiscreet if I tell you the name—admitting frankly that some of the context puzzled me. It was—'Anne.'"

It may be seen what bond of error united the old French Bishop and the middy of the *Pomone*.

Mme. de la Vireville clasped her little hands together. "But, Monseigneur, that exactly bears out what I said about his desiring a son. Anne is the name of the little boy I was referring to just now—Anne-Hilarion de Flavigny, his friend's son—the friend about whose fate, as Your Grandeur knows, Fortuné was anxious, but who proves, after all, to have been saved at Quiberon. Fortuné had promised the Marquis de Flavigny to look after the child if he—the Marquis —were killed."

"But now, as the Marquis escaped, he will not be called upon to undertake this charge?"

"No, Monseigneur."

"That is a pity," said the Bishop, looking down reflectively at the radiant face of a little beruffed aconite at his feet. "There are all sorts of doors which only a child's hands can unlock." And, still looking at the aconite, he went on gently: "Madame, I should be doing wrong were I to disguise from you that the doctor does not think well of the lethargy which seems latterly to have taken possession of your son, and which appears to have so much connection with his physical condition."

"I know it," said the poor mother, all the delicate colour gone from her cheeks. "But what more can I do, Monseigneur? I know that Fortuné loves me dearly, but I am old, and represent the past to him, not the future, and it is the past that he needs to forget. . . . He is ill, it is true—he has been very ill—but never have I seen him like this. Always, in whatever vicissitudes—and he has been severely wounded before, and I nursed him in Jersey—always he has been full of gaiety and courage. Now all that seems to have deserted him, as if he did not care to live."

"Madame, is that, after all, so much to be wondered at?" asked the Bishop gravely. "If you or I had fought at Quiberon, and had seen nearly all our comrades massacred in cold blood, might we not be tempted to feel the same? There is much buried on that shore which engulfed so many hopes. I think M. de la Vireville has left his there, as others their lives. There is not, I fancy, any great difference between the two losses. . . . Still, as I said, a child's hand holds many keys, to shut or to open." He stooped at last, a little painfully, and picked the aconite, and added to himself, "As we say to the Child who was Himself the Key . . . *O Clavis David, qui aperis et nemo claudit; claudis et nemo aperit, veni et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in umbra mortis.* . . . I wish your son could have had the care of this child you speak of."

Mme. de la Vireville could not reply. She had hidden her face in her hands, and the tears were trickling through them. The little old man, holding the golden flower in his fingers, stood and looked at her with a great pity in his eyes.

Suddenly, however, something else came into them—a gleam of recollection. He looked half doubtfully upon the weeping woman before him, compressed his lips, then appeared to make up his mind.

"My daughter," he said, "it has only just come back to my memory, strangely enough, that one night . . .

now this, I fear, really is betraying an involuntary confidence, but for your sake I am going to do it . . . one night I heard your son murmuring to himself a name which can only have been a woman's. But perhaps, again, it was *hers*. . . ."

Mme. de la Vireville raised her tear-stained face from her hands. "What was the name, Monseigneur?"

"'Raymonde,'" said the Bishop.

It was no coup manqué this time. The little mother gazed at him thunderstruck, amazement, incredulity, and something that might almost have been a strangled joy chasing each other over her fragile countenance.

"'Raymonde'?" she repeated. "I . . . it cannot be . . . I know no one of that name!"

"But evidently your son does, Madame," suggested His Grandeur, unable to restrain the phantom of a smile. "It was the only time I ever heard him mention it. He seemed to be beseeching this 'Raymonde' to come to him."

Mme. de la Vireville had no words. Nor had she tears now; her astonishment had dried them. She stared at Monseigneur, who stood there with the bright aconite flower in his pale old hands, which were folded across the purple sash showing between the folds of his cloak, and she said nothing.

"Your experience of the world, my daughter," went on the Bishop, "must have taught you that even the most devoted son does not always confide everything to his mother. In this case, doubtless, the time was not ripe."

The time, however, did seem to him ripe to leave this mother to reflect on the information that he had just given her, and, the sound of a clock striking noon issuing most appositely at this moment from the house, he seized the opportunity to add:

"If you will excuse me, Madame, for a few moments? I must say my office."

And pulling out his shabby breviary he went off down the path in a manner more than diplomatic,

for he had said Sext before ever Mme. de la Vireville came into the garden. However, one can always get ahead with advantage.

But when a conviction of ten years' growth—one, moreover, which you have just been stoutly affirming with your own lips—is as suddenly felled as was Mme. de la Vireville's about her son, it is natural to find its collapse somewhat devastating. Fortuné's mother, hardly aware that Monseigneur had left her, stood beside the snowdrops, certainly more engrossed than was Monseigneur himself at the other end of the path—and the antiphon to *her* Hours was a name she had never heard before.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CHILD UNLOCKS THE DOOR

(I)

THE Chevalier de la Vireville was lying, as he had so often lain, staring at the stuffed trout and the triptych of the Assumption. The adventurous and disappointed spirit which dwelt in him, that had always faced with a jest every blow of circumstance—but one—had indeed ebbed very low. Although the sun which five days ago had opened the aconites in the garden came streaming into the room in a way to rejoice the heart of the room's late owner, who had given it up for that very reason, the present occupant was perfectly indifferent as to whether the sun shone or no. He was back at Quiberon in the rain—back at Auray in the little chapel, emptied of all its victims save him alone—back in front of those levelled muskets which he alone had escaped. . . . Why, in God's name, had fate so marked him out for safety? Why had he put himself to the agony of that derelict voyage to Houat and the long suffering that came after? Mostly because of his promise to his friend, and because he thought Anne wanted him . . . or because he wanted Anne. But he was not needed, neither by the boy nor by anyone. He had built a foolish dream on the assumption of René's death, which to him had seemed a certainty. The dream had proved baseless, like everything else, and all it had done was to plant in his sincere thankfulness for René's escape a thorn of regret which was horrible to him, and made him,

who had suffered so bitterly from treachery, feel a traitor himself.

No, he was not needed any more ; he had done his work. Or rather, he had not even that consolation, for everything to which he had set his hand at Quiberon had been a failure, even though the fault were not his. His men, whom he had never once led to victory in the Morbihan, were dead or disbanded. There was nothing for him to do henceforward, and even had there been, he was useless—a tool that had never been of much account, and was now blunted for the rest of time.

And further back still. . . . Had he not failed to keep the woman he loved, the woman who had spurned even the difficult sacrifice he had made for her sake, when he had spared her lover ? He had no daily perils now to anodyne that ache. But he had another ache to set against it. . . .

Yes, for ironically enough, at the very hour, five days ago, when his mother was protesting in the garden to the Bishop that he could never think of another woman, he *was* thinking of one. Equally had Mme. de la Vireville, almost incredulous, carried about for five days her half-knowledge, longing for her son to speak that name which meant nothing to her, yet hinted at so much ; studying him at odd moments, trying not to feel hurt at his reserve, puzzled, hoping, fearing, and far from guessing that this 'Raymonde,' to Fortuné's mind, was not a subject of which he could ever speak to anyone. For the thought of her warred against that perverted faithfulness to the faithless which had made his torment these ten years.

Yet day after day the vision of Mme. de Guéfontaine had been dwelling more and more constantly with him, and her image, by a volition, so it seemed, of its own, seeking to efface that other. From its beginning in that night of agony and effort at Quiberon, its renewal in the drifting boat, the process had gone on gaining vitality

with time. At Houat he had wakened once from fever to fancy that he was lying with his head pillowed on her arm, as he had done that evening when he had stumbled exhausted into the old manoir. That had proved to be but fever also ; his aching head had no such support, and the English corporal of marines who sat by him, though kind enough, had very little suggestion of Raymonde about him. Yet the illusion had given the wounded man such extraordinary pleasure, and so surprising a sense of rest and security, that he used, in those barren days, to try to repeat it by a conscious act of the imagination. She *had* sat by his couch, once, through the night . . . she had walked by his horse's stirrup on a spring evening towards the sea . . . and among the nodding sea-holly she had kissed his hand. It was his last memory of her, almost as startling as his first. . . .

And now in England he thought of her too—fitfully at first, then incessantly. But this had served in no way to lighten his depression. For he was not in love with her, he told himself—how could he be ? Was not all his heart seared over with a fatal memory ? Those shackles could not be loosed now—and even were they miraculously to be smitten from him, what had he to offer another woman ? A maimed body, an empty purse, a ruined home. . . .

And yet oddly, persistently, he would see himself standing with her under the larches in front of a house like Kerdronan, that was perished, and with them stood a little boy like Anne, who did not need him and was gone from him. . . . He was suddenly possessed now by that foolish and torturing vision, and lay there clenching and unclenching his hand, as though in physical pain. No, he and Kerdronan would go into the dust together, and it was no use reflecting on what might have been. They were both broken and done with, he and his home—and no great loss, doubtless, after all.

" Good God ! " he exclaimed at last, " what a

cowardly fool I am, lying here and moaning like a sick girl because I am short of an arm ! "

He shut his eyes on that self-condemnation (which had not helped him), and did not trouble to open them when there came a knock at the door. Nor, as he still kept them closed when he said " Come in ! " did he see who opened it, and Mr. Elphinstone's face in the doorway looking at him with a smile that died away to concern. He only heard the door shut again, and supposed that the visitor, his mother, or Monseigneur, had decided after all not to disturb him.

(2)

The treble voice, therefore, that said his name suddenly and softly gave him a violent start. He opened his eyes to see Anne-Hilarion standing by the closed door, carrying in both his hands a large glass bowl wherein there swam an enormously magnified goldfish.

" *Anne !* " he exclaimed, in a voice of utter incredulity.

And then the sight of him, unchanged, solemn-eyed and engaging as ever, the touching absurdity of his bringing a goldfish all the way from London to cheer a sick Chouan, caused La Vireville to break into a weak laugh that was half something else.

" Oh, M. le Chevalier ! " cried Anne, gazing at him. Then he deposited his precious burden with haste on the floor, and, running to the bed, flung himself into the welcome of La Vireville's arm.

" My cabbage, my little comrade ! " murmured the émigré, and he kissed the cold, fresh cheek again and again. " You are not changed at all—yes, I suppose you have grown. . . . Then you have not forgotten me after all ? Have you come all this way to see your poor bedridden uncle—not by yourself, though, I trust ? "

"Oh no," replied Anne-Hilarion, his arms round Fortuné's neck. "Grandpapa brought me. I wanted to see you so much!" He hugged him hard, then, drawing back a little, eyed him with a sudden doubt. La Vireville hastily withdrew his arm and pulled the bedclothes over his left side.

"Come and get up on the bed," he suggested, "and we can talk better."

The Comte de Flavigny, needing no second invitation, incontinently scrambled up—not without difficulty, for the bed was high.

"I am not too heavy?" he inquired rather anxiously, as he took a seat on La Vireville's legs. "Papa says I am getting too heavy for him."

And, as a matter of fact, he had planted himself exactly on one of the more painful souvenirs of the Ile de Houat; but La Vireville would not for worlds have asked him to move.

"You are a mere featherweight," he assured him. "And is your father nearly well again, Anne? He has written to me, but he did not say much about himself."

"Papa looks much better than you do, M. le Chevalier," said the little boy critically. "He can walk quite well now. He is coming to see you when he is quite better. Grandpapa is downstairs, you know; he will come up soon, I expect."

La Vireville, in his turn, surveyed the visitor perched on his body. Anne's legs, in their blue pantaloons, stuck out straight in front of him on the bed; the shoes at the end of them looked ridiculously small. His curls, falling on his deep ruffle, seemed heavier and a little longer than of yore, and the sun was busily employed in gilding them. For the first time, therefore, La Vireville was really conscious of the presence of that luminary.

Anne-Hilarion was the first to break the silence. "Did Papa tell you in his letter," he inquired, "that a lady came into the garden to ask for you, M. le Chevalier?"

"A lady!" exclaimed Fortuné. "What garden, child—here?"

"Oh no," replied Anne. "The garden in the Square at home. It is a long time ago now. I was there, and John Simms, and I had leaves in my cart—dead leaves—and she came in, all in black, and she asked if you had come back from France, and I said no, and then I cried, and I think she cried too, and she kissed me, and then Grandpapa came, and——"

"Stop a moment!" cried La Vireville, who was not without experience of the volume of detail Anne could pour forth when once he was embarked on the tide of narration. "What was the lady like? Was she young?"

"She was not so old as Elspeth," pronounced the Comte de Flavigny, after due thought.

La Vireville gave a rather shaken laugh. Had this impossible thing really happened? Anne-Hilarion never lied. But—it must have been someone else!

"You did not learn her name, I suppose, child?" he asked, his heart beginning to thud.

"Yes," responded Anne. "I asked Grandpapa afterwards, because I liked her. She was called the Comtesse de Préfontaine—or perhaps it was Gué-fontaine."

La Vireville's heart missed a couple of beats, then pounded harder than ever, seeming to shake his whole body—a humiliating experience. But for his present physical condition, however, no doubt he would not have gasped for breath as he did, nor would the colour have come and gone like a woman's in his hollow cheeks. Nevertheless, as both these things happened, Anne-Hilarion looked at him in a little dismay.

"You are—do you feel ill, M. le Chevalier?" he asked solicitously.

"No—yes," stammered Fortuné, lifting himself on his elbow. "No, child, don't move! It is not that you are . . . too heavy." He drew a long breath, closed his eyes, and dropped back on his

pillows. "What did you and Grandpapa tell Mme. de Guéfontaine?" he asked, after a moment.

"Grandpapa told her, I think, that the Republican soldiers had shot you at that place—Quiberon. . . . M. le Chevalier," continued Anne, leaning with very wide-open eyes towards him, and thus still further contributing to the discomfort of the leg on which he was situated, "did they really and truly shoot you?"

"Well," said Fortuné, in a dreamy voice, "they did and they did not. Anyhow, here I am, you see." He reopened his eyes.

"Yes," said Anne, in a tone of great contentment, and bestowed on his friend one of those infrequent smiles of his, sudden and shy, at the same time sliding his hand into the strong, wasted one lying idly near it on the coverlet.

A thrill ran up Fortuné's arm. Ever since he had seen Anne standing by the door he had been conscious of a strange sensation, as if, with the advent of the child who had sailed the seas with him on that wild adventure, there had begun to blow through his hot brain the first whisper of a clean and joyous breath that came from the waves themselves. A moment or two ago, those lips had made him an annunciation the full meaning of which he could hardly grasp. Now, at the little warm touch, his eyes were suddenly opened, and he saw the tainted memory in his heart as only a handful of dead dust, not worth the keeping, fit only to be scattered on that wind of morning. It was the past, useless and done with, a thing long dead. . . . Here, close to him, touching him, smiling at him, enshrined in this child who had no past, shone the future, like something gallant and green with the dew on it, and, blowing over it, that strong, fresh wind. The worthless burden he had carried for years fell from him. He too could have what René de Flavigny had, the air of morning at his gates—nay, morning's self. . . .

In the almost physical sense of deliverance he must

have gripped Anne-Hilarion's hand very hard, for the child gave a movement.

"Little pigeon, have I hurt you?" cried La Vireville, instantly penitent, releasing the imprisoned hand. "I am so sorry. . . . I did not know that I was still so strong." At the moment, indeed, he hardly knew anything—scarcely, even, what he was saying

Anne-Hilarion carried the injured member to his mouth for a second or two, then he put it back in La Vireville's palm. "I am very glad that you are so strong, M. le Chevalier," he said valiantly. "Perhaps you will soon be quite well again. I hope so very much. And then—what are you going to do?"

"What am I going to do, Anne?" A little while ago, under that cloud of lassitude and depression, the question would have seemed a mockery. "Well, you know—or you will soon know—that they had to cut off my other arm, but I can still hold a sword—and hurt a small boy's hand, eh? When I get quite better I shall go back to the heather, and the sea, and perhaps . . ." He broke off and fell silent, staring at his visitor with an air compound of bewilderment and meditation. "Meanwhile, am I not to see the new goldfish?"

Anne-Hilarion slipped promptly from the bed and ran to the corner by the door. Anon, raising himself from his stooping position, and carrying it between his hands with even more than his accustomed care, he came back with his trophy. His eyes were very bright.

"It is my biggest one of all," he observed, as La Vireville propped himself on his elbow to view the captive. "I called it after you, M. le Chevalier . . . you do not mind? And I thought, as you were ill . . . and I heard Papa and Grandpapa say you could never be repaid for coming after me to France . . . you might . . . I mean I brought it to give it to you, if you liked . . . for your own!"

"Oh, my child," said La Vireville, rather breathlessly, "you have given me much more than that!"

BOOK FOUR

THE OLDEST ROAD OF ALL

"Be it wind, be it weet, be it hail, be it sleet,
Our ship must sail the faem;
The king's daughter o' Noroway,
'Tis we must fetch her hame."

Sir Patrick Spens.

"All quests end here, all voyagings, all ventures:
Is not my white breast haven to your sail?"

The Wave's Song.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Flower of the Gorse

(I)

A BRILLIANT May morning of sun and wind was exulting over the beautiful harbour of St. Peter Port at Guernsey, and over the old town rising steeply like an amphitheatre from its blue waters. But the aged salt who was making his way up one of the narrow streets with a basket of freshly caught lobsters on his arm was not particularly responsive to the sunshine; indeed, the air with which he paused and mopped his red face suggested that an injured "Very hot for the time of year!" would issue from his bearded mouth in response to any greeting.

As he put away his bandana and prepared to resume his ascent of the cobbles, he observed two persons coming down, one behind the other—a young man in uniform, and, in front of him, a girl in the old Guernsey costume of chintz-patterned, quilted gown, opening in front over the black stuff petticoat into the pocket-holes of which, after the island fashion, it was tucked. This damsel came tripping down, despite the steepness of the street, happy no doubt in the conviction that the officer behind her was admiring her trim feet and ankles in their blue stockings and buckled black velvet shoes. Unfortunately the officer could not see her pretty face, framed in a close mob cap under an ugly bonnet with enormous bows. Only the ascending fisherman, at the moment, had a sight of that, and yet his gaze was fixed precisely on the soldier behind

her, scenting a possible purchaser in him rather than in the native maiden. And the officer, too, seemed to have his eye on the fisherman, and slackened his pace as he came nearer. So Beauty, casting half a glance on the writhing lobsters, passed unheeded.

"I suppose you can't tell me, mon vieux, the name of that vessel just come into harbour?" asked the officer, stopping.

The uniform was English, but the wearer did not look quite English, and he spoke in French. As a native of the Channel Islands the ancient mariner accosted should have understood that tongue, but for purposes of his own he affected not to do so.

"Very fine they are, indeed, sir!" he replied, peering into his basket. "Comes from the rocks over by L'Etac, they do. You wants to know the price? Well, this one——" and he held out a freckled ebony form that slowly waved its spectral antennæ at the young officer.

The latter pushed it aside with an impatient cane. "No, no—I don't want one of those things to-day. I wish to know what that vessel down there is—and I am sure you understand me perfectly!"

Having observed with one eye that the officer's other hand was moving in the direction of his waist-coat pocket, the seafarer turned both in the direction of the Frenchman's pointing cane. "Ah, yon, just about to make fast," he said, pointing, too, with the rejected lobster. "She'll likely be the Government sloop *Cormorant*, bound for Jersey, come in here with despatches. . . . Thank you, sir! And you won't take this beauty home to your good lady?"

But the young officer shook his head with a smile, and continued his downward path to the harbour.

Although to many dwellers in a port, especially in an island port, the mere arrival and identification of a vessel is in itself a matter of interest, this young Frenchman had a particular reason for questioning the fisherman. The major of his regiment was ill;

medicaments had been ordered from England, and Lieutenant Henri du Coudrais, finding himself unoccupied after an early parade, had offered, on news of the arrival of a sail, to go down to the harbour, instead of the major's servant, and ascertain if the drugs in question had come.

But the sloop, when he got down to the quayside, had only just finished making fast. Evidently she had a passenger, for he observed among the sailors on her deck a tall man in a grey redingote, whose general appearance seemed, somehow, to be familiar. But he could not see his face, and thought no more about him till in a few moments he came over the gang-plank.

And then, in one and the same instant, Henri du Coudrais saw that the passenger's left sleeve was pinned to his breast, and recognised him. A second later, and he had himself been recognised by those keen eyes.

"M. du Coudrais!" called out the newcomer. "What good fortune brings you here? I was just about to ask my way to your lodging."

The young officer had been stricken dumb for a moment. "M. de la Vireville!" he exclaimed at last. "Is it possible?"

"Why not?" asked La Vireville, holding out his hand. "But I suppose you thought that I was dead?"

"Indeed we did!" confessed his compatriot, grasping the proffered hand warmly. "After many inquiries, we were convinced at last. Then you escaped after all! But I am sorry to see . . ."

"Oh, I left that at Houat," said Fortuné composedly. "An unnecessary luxury, two arms, I assure you, mon ami. I cannot think how I ever found work for both. You are surprised to see me? Well, I am on my way to Jersey; the sloop sails again this afternoon. I came by her because she was touching here, and I wished to wait upon you and Mme. de Guéfontaine."

"For my part, Chevalier, I am delighted to see

you," said du Coudrais, with much cordiality, "and I hope you will do me the honour of dining with me; but my sister, I am sorry to say, is not with me for the moment. She is over in Sark."

"In Sark?" repeated Fortuné, surprised, looking instinctively over the intense blue to where, six or seven miles away, the little island floated like a rock-set jewel. "When will she return?"

"Not until to-morrow or the day after, I am afraid," answered her brother. "She has gone over to see a poor émigré family settled in a farm there—that of an old nurse, in fact. She generally spends a night or two with them. I need not tell you, Chevalier, how sorry she will be to miss you. Could you not stay here till her return? The hospitality that I can offer you is not very sumptuous, but I should be deeply honoured by your acceptance of it."

Fortuné bit his lip thoughtfully, still looking over the sea to Sark. Then he shook his head. "I thank you a thousand times, but I cannot stay. I am awaited at Jersey. . . . Will you give me a word in private, M. du Coudrais?—over there, for instance, at the end of the jetty, would serve."

"Willingly," said Raymonde's brother, and followed him.

"You may possibly guess, Monsieur," began La Vireville, still preoccupied with the sight of Sark, "why I wish to wait upon Mme. de Guéfontaine?"

The young officer took on a very discreet air. "You are, perhaps, in need of an agent de la correspondance over there again?"

La Vireville smiled. "Of that—and more," he said. "God knows I have little enough to offer her—probably she won't even look at me—but I should be glad to know that I had your consent to address your sister."

"M. le Chevalier," retorted Henri du Coudrais, "do you suppose that I have forgotten last April? I have not met any man to whom I would sooner

commit my sister. As for Raymonde—but she must speak for herself."

"You are very kind, du Coudrais," said La Vireville, but he sighed. "I wish I could think your sister would be as easily pleased. . . . It is only right to point out to you that I have neither money, nor prospects, nor a home, nor even two arms, to offer her——"

"But you asserted just now that one was sufficient," observed Henri du Coudrais, leaning back with a smile against the rail that ran out to the beacon light. "As for fortune or prospects, which of us émigrés has those nowadays? And upon my soul, I don't know a woman on earth who is less set on either than Raymonde."

"I suppose that I ought not to ask if there is any other man?"

"There was the Duc de Pontferrand; she refused him last October—just at the time, Monsieur Augustin, when she was making inquiries about you in London from the old gentleman whose name I cannot remember, who lives with a little boy in Cavendish Square."

"I know she did that, God bless her!" said La Vireville. "I did not, of course, know about the Duc." He fell silent, fingering the rail and still gazing out to sea. It occurred to du Coudrais that though he had the look of one who has weathered a long and trying illness, he yet seemed in some indefinable way a younger man.

"Why should I not hire a boat and sail over to Sark?" asked La Vireville suddenly. "My wooing must in any case be rough and ready. I could be back before the *Cormorant* sails, if I went at once."

"Ma foi, an excellent idea!" said Raymonde's brother heartily. "That is, of course, the solution. I will procure you a boat, if you wish. You must be sure to take a native with you, even though the distance be not great, for sailing hereabouts is dangerous, if

only on account of the hidden rocks—' stones,' as they call them." He looked about him. " There is Tom Le Pelley ; he would serve your purpose."

(2)

A quarter of an hour later La Vireville was sailing over that laughing expanse towards the gem of rose and emerald and flame, whose beauty, though his eyes were set upon it all the while, he hardly marked. The boatman spoke of channels and swift tides, of the Anfroques, the Longue Pierre, the Goubinière, but names of reefs and rocks went by La Vireville unheeded. He was going to put to the test what Anne-Hilarion had shown him. He was liberated at last from his servitude of mind, and he wanted Raymonde —wanted her with all his heart. It was very strange to him now that he had not known this when he was with her more than a year ago.

Du Coudrais had given him the name of the farm which Mme. de Guéfontaine had gone to visit, and once landed he found it easily enough, for there were not many of them on that slender strip of an isle, pillared on its rocks and magic caves. But Raymonde was not there, and they told him that she was out on one of the headlands.

And there, after a space, he found her, among the golden brands of the gorse, looking out to sea in the direction of the coast of France. The wind blew against her ; she shaded her eyes with her hand under her little three-cornered hat, as from the lovely land of exile she gazed intently at a dearer shore. She did not see him, nor, from the talk of the wind in her ears, hear his footsteps brushing through the gorse —and Fortuné stopped short, for now that he beheld her again with his bodily eyes he knew that his desire for her was even greater than he had thought, and in proportion the fear swelled in him to conviction that

so great a gift could never be meant for him. So he stood there bareheaded in the sunshine, his heart mingled flame and water, aching to see her hidden face, and yet afraid to put his destiny to the touch. But at last, since she was still unconscious of his presence, he was forced to make it known.

"Madame!"

And at that she turned round with a start. Colour swept over her face and was gone again, and in her eyes there was something that was almost fear.

"Monsieur . . . de la Vireville!" she exclaimed, on a sharp catch of the breath.

It was the first time, as he instantly realised, that she had ever called him by his name, that name which was dipped for her in such painful memories.

"Me voici!" said he, and casting his hat on to a gorse bush advanced to kiss her hand.

"I . . . I am not sure . . . that you are not a ghost!" she said, not very steadily, as she surrendered it.

"Indeed I am not!" he unnecessarily assured her, for the kiss he put on it must have convinced her that he was flesh and blood, and perhaps the wave of colour which once more dyed her face derived its temperature from the warmth of that salutation.

"But you . . . M. le Chevalier, but you *have* returned from the dead! They told me you had been shot!"

"Yes, I *have* returned from the dead," agreed Fortuné—"for a purpose."

She did not ask what the purpose was; she still seemed shaken, uncertain of herself and of him. But her gaze, swift and compassionate, swept over everything that the sunlight showed so relentlessly—the traces of past suffering on his face, the added grey at his temples, and the pinned-up sleeve.

"Ah, que vous avez dû souffrir!" she said to herself. Then she put her hand to her head, as if she still felt herself in a dream.

" But where have you come from, M. le Chevalier ? " she asked. " And why are you here, in Sark? "

He looked at her full, and answered bluntly, " To ask you to marry me ! "

But as, giving an exclamation, she turned away, he hastily abandoned this ground.

" I have nothing to offer you, Madame," he went on quickly. " Neither money nor position nor a home, nor even two arms to defend you. The Republic has taken all those. And—for I am determined to be very frank with you—I must tell you that for ten years my heart has not been my own to offer. It was pledged to a memory. It has come back to me now, thank God, but I fear it has the dust of those years on it, and I am no longer very young." He paused a moment, and the sea of Sark, that is for ever booming in its enchanted caverns, gave a dull echo to his words. " It is because you too, Raymonde, have greatly loved and hated—I happen, do I not, to know how much ? " he added, with the shadow of a smile—" that I am thus open with you. But my old love and hate are both over and done with now. I have a new, a better love—and it is all yours, as long as I shall live."

Mme. de Guéfontaine was examining a single childish bloom of gorse, just outgrowing its rough yellow-brown pinafore. And she said nothing.

" I have no time to wrap this meagre offer in fair phrases," went on Fortuné. " I doubt if they would improve it, and you are not, I think, the woman to care for them. I can only say this over and over again, that I love you and that I want you. It was you—the thought of you—that saved me at Quiberon ; I used to dream of you at Houat. *Raymonde !* "

Still she did not answer, and stood with her head averted.

" Raymonde," said he, coming a little nearer, mingled command and entreaty in his tone, " for God's sake put down that flower and answer me !—

only do not send me back to France with a refusal! If you cannot make up your mind to-day—and I must crave your forgiveness indeed for so blunt and hasty a wooing—at least let me take back with me a glimmer of hope!"

At that she looked up. Her face was transfigured, but he dared not try to interpret its new meaning.

"You are going back to France, in spite of everything, to that old life of peril and hardships?"

"Of course," said he. "But if you would accept it, I should have a home to offer you in Jersey. And when better days come——"

She interrupted him. "You misunderstand me, M. le Chevalier. I should not marry any man who was risking his life over there, to stay behind myself in safety. A wife's place, if she can help him, is with her husband." A smile wove itself into the beautiful radiance. "Shall you not need an agent at Kerdronan?"

For a second the gorse heaved beneath him. "Do you mean what you are saying?" cried La Vireville, seizing her wrist. "Will you really marry a penniless cripple who has nothing but his sword?"

Her smile was brilliant now, and dazzled Fortuné while she faced him, captive, as on a certain morning a year ago. "No, M. de la Vireville, I shall marry a man! As you know, for three years I had hated your name. But, as you wear it, I have long seen that I could not take a nobler."

So the woman he desired lay at last against Fortuné de la Vireville's breast, and up from the sea of gorse in which they stood welled the warm honey-sweet scent that is like no other in the world to steal away the heart. The wind had dropped to a caress; it caught at Raymonde's gown no longer, and out over the illimitable wrinkled blue, from the height on which they stood, the poised gulls looked like slowly drifting flecks of snow.

But out over there was also the long purple line of Jersey, and his pledged word. Time was all too short. As long as he lived the scent of gorse would always bring this hour to him, but the actual hour itself was measured with very few sands.

"Will you come back with me now to Guernsey, to your brother, Raymonde?" he asked softly, stooping his head.

"Yes," she answered, without moving. Her voice sounded like a voice in a dream.

"And I will return from Jersey, and we will be married at once?"

"Yes," she said again.

"My God, I can't believe it!" said Fortuné to himself, and kissed her once more.

So they went together to the little farm, itself named from the gorse, the Clos-ajonc, to tell her pensioners that she was leaving them immediately. And, no doubt to show that she did not consider him so maimed as to be incapable of affording her support, Raymonde leant all the way upon his arm.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Flower of the Foam

La Vireville did not go into the little Clos-ajonc with his lady. He waited for her outside, leaning upon its low, whitewashed wall, over which the tamarisk whispered with its feathery foliage. Breaths of the gorse came to him even here, and the whole warm air was vibrating with the lark's ecstasy. And Fortuné could hardly believe his happiness, so strange a thing to him. Old dreams, long put away, came back to him, merged in the new. Had he not yearned sometimes, despite himself, to have, in what remained of this hard and shifting existence of his, brief enough in its pleasures but endless in its unceasing fatigue and peril and anxiety—the life that was often no better than a hunted animal's—to have one place that was home, and shrine, and star? Well, he had his desire now; he had won that place, that heart, at last.

Yet even as he leant there, absorbed in contemplation, his mind was suddenly pierced with a most evil arrow of a thought. What if Raymonde had taken him out of pity, as a woman sometimes will . . . or worse, out of a sense of gratitude?

The idea assailed him so unexpectedly, and so much from without his own consciousness, that La Vireville dropped the strand of tamarisk which he was idly fingering, and started up, straightening himself as under an actual physical blow. Good God, it was impossible! "*No,*" said a tiny derisive voice in his heart, "*far from it! It is very possible. Even as to you yourself she is but a makeshift—you told her so with*

your own lips—so to her you are only a man for whom she is sorry, and to whom she is under an obligation. So much the better for you! And what else did you expect?"

And part of this two-sided onslaught La Vireville instantly and furiously repelled. No, no, it was a lie—she was not a makeshift! If he had spilt the best years of his life before another, a barren altar, he knew better now. He loved Raymonde deeply and sincerely, with a better love than he had given to that other. But Raymonde's own motive in accepting him—how should he answer for that? Now that it had once occurred to him, he saw that it was only too likely—she had taken him out of pity.

He leant upon the wall again and covered his eyes with his hand. The scene of his brief wooing, scarce concluded, passed once more before him. Again he saw her studying the gorse blossom, weighing what she should do. Yes, she had taken and returned his kisses—but had he not read compassion in her very eyes at her first sight of him, with that hateful empty sleeve? Yes, she had said that she was proud to bear his name—but that might well be an act of atonement for the past. She had spoken of helping him, of being by his side. Well, there was such a thing—curse it!—as gratitude; and she owed him her freedom, if not her life. But for him she had not stood on Sark to-day. That he had a claim on her had never, till this moment, come into his thoughts. Now his past knight-errantry stared at him like a crime. Her accepted lover . . . from pity and a sense of obligation! Could it really be so? Alas! who was to answer that it was not?

Fortuné uncovered his eyes, and, catching at a sprig of tamarisk, tore at it moodily with his teeth. The lark's song had ceased; even the sunlight seemed dimmed and unreal, as in time of eclipse. Yes, now that the exhilaration was over, he saw that he had been a fool. He glanced at his sleeve, thought of his

lean purse, his blackened home. Of course she had accepted him because she was sorry for him, and because she thought that she owed him a debt and must pay it somehow! How could he have come to her expecting anything else, for what had he in the world—except his love—to lay at her feet?

And perhaps, after all, that love was not so strong nor so worthy as he had thought. Fortuné was very little used to introspection, and the thought shook him how easy it was, evidently, to delude oneself. Ought he not, at any rate, to put an end to the situation before it went farther, and, as a man of honour, offer to release Raymonde from the promise which a moment of compassion had wrung from her? . . . The idea was agony, but the wound to his pride was agony too. . . .

And at that very moment Raymonde came along the pebbled path that led from the door of the farmhouse. Her cloak was over her arm, a little basket in her hand; she turned her head and smiled at the old woman and the two children who watched her from the low doorway. And at the sight of her, at the movement of her head, her smile, the thought of releasing her left him as swiftly as it had come to him. He could not do it; he wanted her too much. If she had taken him out of pity or gratitude, so be it! —on whatever terms, so only she were his!

Something of the sudden conflict that had rent him must have been visible in his air, for as he held the gate open for her, and she had thanked him by a smile, she said quickly:

"Qu'avez-vous, mon ami? Was the sun too hot here?"

"I have been thinking over my good fortune," said her lover gravely. "Give me your cloak."

"I am glad that I have it with me," she remarked, as she complied. "I think there is a storm coming up."

La Vireville looked round. She was right; and he,

used as he was to scanning the horizon in sailor fashion, had been too much absorbed to notice it. A continent of cloud was rising out of the sea to the north-east.

"I think it will pass over," pronounced the Chouan, looking at it. "But in any case we ought to hasten."

And soon they were making their way over the short turf of the down that runs to the head of the tiny Baie des Eperqueries, where Fortuné had left his boat, the only one riding in that small and solitary harbourage. A rusty culverin of Elizabethan days lay embedded in the short grass at the top. It was nearly low tide; down beneath the cove was tapestried with seaweed, green and purple and spotted, fan-shaped or ribbon-fashioned, and a pair of puffins, from their breeding-place at the other side of the island, sat solemnly side by side, like parrots, on a crag.

"I told the boatman to wait for me here," remarked La Vireville, as they made their way down the zigzag path. "I do not see him anywhere; ah, there he is!"

A jerseyed figure was, in fact, lying on its face about half-way down the slope.

"Come, wake up!" said the émigré, bending over him when they reached him. There being no response to this invitation, he shook the sleeper vigorously.

"Ma foi, this is a very sound sleep!" He stooped and picked up something. "And this is its cause!" He held out to Raymonde an empty brandy flask. "Cognac from our native land! He is dead drunk. What are we to do? Sail without him?"

"Yes," said she, without hesitation.

La Vireville weighed the thought. It was what he wished. Their time together was already so brief, that to put to sea together without a third, even for that short voyage, was a great temptation. "I do not know the channel," he said reflectively, "but the wind will not serve us ill for Guernsey."

"But I have sailed the channel, the Great Russel,

several times," said Raymonde quickly. "The mark for the mid-channel, till you get within a mile from the islet of Jethou, is St. Martin's Tower in Guernsey. I can point it out to you. If we put out at once we can get back before the storm comes up—if it is coming up at all—whereas if we go round to the other side of the island, to Creux Harbour, to find a pilot, we shall be indefinitely delayed."

"You are quite right," said her lover, gazing at her where she stood a little below him on the sunlit slope. "But I do not like the look of the weather. Yet I must get back to St. Peter Port and catch the sloop before she sails—I have given my word. The best is for you to stay here, and I will go alone."

"No, no!" she cried vehemently. "That is not safe! You are not familiar with the sunken rocks. I am, and I know something of handling a boat. You will have more than you can do alone."

Yes, he was a one-armed man now! Through his gladness at her decision to accompany him pierced for a second the point of that assailing thought of compassion. But it did not stay with him; he beat it off as one would a vampire, and followed her down the path.

The gulls were screaming overhead, and the waves lopped half-playfully, half-menacingly against the sides of the sailing-boat as he pulled her in from her moorings. As if the two puffins had only waited to know his decision, they now left their perch, and fluttered off with their absurd, ineffectual, mothlike flight.

"I wish you would not come, Raymonde," he said half-heartedly, as he helped her aboard.

"Since when have you become a fairweather sailor, Monsieur Augustin?" she retorted.

"At any rate we will take a reef in the mainsail before we start," said Monsieur Augustin, and together they did it. The small mizen over the stern was still standing, and he left it so. Forward he set the jib only. And as they moved out of the little spell-

bound harbourage, so painted with the hues of the seaweed, they did not, despite the ruffled, slaty-blue water, appear to be doing anything very foolhardy.

Raymonde steered, because she knew the whereabouts of the 'stones,' and he sat facing her on the thwart, the end of the mainsheet in his hand. Neither spoke much at first; to him, at least, as he gazed at her the hour was sacred. Yes, on whatever terms, so only she were his!

So, almost in silence, they rounded the Pointe de Nez, the extreme northern corner of Sark, and set the course for Guernsey.

"And now," said Raymonde de Guéfontaine, "it is time to tell me how you escaped at Quiberon."

So, as the little boat held on, with a freshening wind, under a sky growing overcast, Fortuné told her. He had not foreseen the exquisite pleasure that it would be to him to make that recital to this, of all listeners.

"It is incredible—miraculous!" she exclaimed at the end, drawing a long breath. "You must have had some talisman, some charm!"

"On the contrary, I refused one," said her lover, laughing, and he told her of Grain d'Orge's consecrated cow's tail. The episode led her to ask news of that unwilling squire of hers, and Fortuné told her that a few weeks ago he had had the satisfaction of receiving, by way of Jersey, a grimy and ill-spelt letter from Kerdronan, in which the veteran campaigner, availing himself of the services of the most cultivated of the band (for he could not even sign his name himself) informed his leader, on the chance of the latter's being alive, that he and various others had escaped to the mainland as indicated, and had made their way up to the Côtes-du-Nord, and that he was reorganising the parishes round Kerdronan against such time as M. Augustin should come back to them. Le Goffic, he added, had been hidden by some peasants at Quiberon till he was sufficiently recovered to sail

across to Sarzeau, in the peninsula of Rhuis, and thence he had joined the forces of Charette in Vendée. But since Charette's capture and execution last March he also, thought Grain d'Orge, was probably on his way to Kerdronan.

"But I *had* a talisman, Raymonde," said the narrator, breaking off. "I had the thought of you, as I have told you. That very unpleasant night at Quiberon, had you not been with me, I should certainly have lain there on the shore till I was found."

"And you had another also," replied Raymonde, glancing aloft at the foreleach of the sail. "What of the little boy—the little boy who cried so for you?"

"Eh bien, cela n'empêchait pas," asseverated La Vireville.—"Yes, it would be better to luff a little; the wind is undoubtedly getting up, and I shall be glad when we make the harbour.—You are right, I had the thought of Anne too, for I had promised his father to look after him if necessary—I forget if I told you that—but as, mercifully, M. de Flavigny was saved, you cannot be *Anne's* mother, Raymonde."

"He is a darling child," said Mme. de Guéfontaine softly, putting the tiller farther over as she was recommended. Her eyes sparkled, then fell. Perhaps that same thought at which Fortuné had hinted was in her mind too at that moment. In Fortuné's at any rate shone that old dream of his of standing under the larches at Kerdronan with her—and another. Yet now as he gazed at her, sitting, so unbelievably, at the helm of his boat, he suddenly saw, behind her, something else. . . . He gave an exclamation and let go the mainsheet.

"Keep the helm over—hard!" he said. "There is a squall coming; it will be on us in a moment. We must have this sail down. Don't leave the tiller!" And without losing a second he began to tug at the mainsail halyards.

But, the blocks running stiffly, or the ropes being swollen, before the sail was more than half-way down

the squall struck them, with a howling blast that seemed to issue from some stupendous bellows, and rain that fell like steel rods. Over, over went the little boat, staggering under the onset, while Fortuné fought desperately both to get the sail completely down and to prevent it, as it came, from flapping into the angry water and pulling them under. It came back to him, like a demon's laughter, as he wrestled with it one-handed, how a few short hours ago he had said that two arms were unnecessary. What a lie!

Yet one terrible question only occupied his mind as he got the sail under control, and as the struggling boat, preserved from overturning only by the way which she had on her, began to right herself—Raymonde! Had she been swept out—for they had been at a fearful angle? No, she was still at her post, clinging to the tiller, gasping, and white as death. But she had not lost her head, and that had saved them. She knew as well as her lover that to keep the helm down was their one chance of avoiding being swamped by the great green seas that were all setting in fury towards the island, and bearing them, half full of water as they were, at each plunge a little nearer to the rocks. Without a word, except her name, uttered in something between a sob and a curse, La Vireville threw himself too on the groaning tiller, and for a few minutes they stood there side by side, staggering with the oscillations of the maddened craft, with the strength of both their bodies bent to one end—to keep that bar of wood, and with it the rudder, as it should be, against the malignant will of the storm. This was their true betrothal, handfasted by the tempest, and, as they would never have known it on the golden and enchanted island, among the gorse, they knew without the interchange of a word, in the howling wind, the pelting, stinging rain, with the water they had shipped swirling about their feet, that they were one indeed.

And presently the boat began to drive forward more

violently. They were abreast of Les Autelets by this time, those fantastic pinnacles that on a sunset evening were things of wonder, now black and sullen amid the flying spray. Above them, too near for safety, frowned the rocky walls of the island, magical no longer (save with an evil magic), but sinister beyond belief. And soon they would come to Brechou, the satellite islet, between which and Sark runs a race so strong that no boat can live in it. And there were the sunken rocks, impossible to avoid now. At any moment they might be dashed on to one of them. Moreover, the boat was so full of water that there seemed almost as much danger of her sinking under them as of her being swamped or overturned.

"One of us must bale!" shouted Fortuné in Raymonde's ear. "You, I think."

She obeyed him instantly, and abandoning the tiller and his side, crawled forward through the water, found a baling tin and set to work. And the man who saw that fine and unquestioning obedience knew for a moment the most bitter regret that the human heart can hold. Why had he been so mad as to come, as to bring her? He had risked his treasure, so newly found, so inexpressibly dear—risked it (and that was the worst) without need, and was now to lose it. For all this effort seemed but postponing the inevitable end. . . . But at least the salt water and the rain had washed him clean of the traces of that long infatuation —yes, and of the light loves of his youth. Now he was hers only, and he and no other man would go down with her under the greedy, hissing waves and share her sleep. . . .

Meanwhile she toiled there, crouched in the bottom of the boat, her wet hair blown in streaks across her face, while he kept the boat's head as much to the seas as he dared, only easing the helm on the approach of a wave that seemed heavy enough to drive her bows under. But immediately afterwards he would luff right into the crest of the wave, and then

as their labouring progress was thereby checked, must put the helm up again for a second, to get the sails full once more, lest the boat should roll over into the trough. It was a task calling for a stout heart and the nicest judgment, and never by a word, nor even by a look, did Raymonde de Guéfontaine, unceasingly working also, distract him or show a sign of fear.

In such tension time scarcely exists, and it would have been hard for Fortuné to say how long he had battled with the immense hostility so suddenly arrayed against them, nor how much water Raymonde's aching arms had, with almost mechanical action, thrown overboard, before it began to seem to him that the smoother sea which followed every three vehement waves or so was of longer duration. Was it possible that the wind was abating? Only then, with the dawn of the first real ray of hope in his heart, did Fortuné become conscious too that with the lessening of the squall the island on their lee had disappeared, blotted out by the pall of mingled mist and rain which enshrouded them also. Perhaps they were still near it for all that? But since the roar of the breaking surf was no longer audible, it struck him that they must be drifting away from Sark, borne by one of those currents, perhaps, of which the boatman had spoken.

"The worst is over, I think," he shouted to Raymonde. She nodded, stopping her baling for a moment to put back her dripping hair, and smiled—it was like a star coming out in a wet sky.

And even as Fortuné shouted he realised that an ordinary tone would have carried to her ear. The uproar had ceased—nay, the wind had dropped almost dead; he could hardly get the jib to draw. They seemed to be motionless in a white silence, though doubtless they were moving faster than they knew. For an instant he thought of hoisting the mainsail again, then decided against it. Of what use advancing when they could see nothing and had no idea of direction?

The sea was still agitated, lifting up countless plucking hands in uneasy bravado, but there was no danger in that. So he left the tiller and stooped over Raymonde.

"That is enough. You have the better of it now, brave heart! My darling, my darling, how wet you are, and how cold!" He pulled her to him, and opening the breast of his soaked redingote made her pillow her head there. She shivered a little and clung to him, and a strange, cold, remote happiness descended upon them both as they drifted on, physically and mentally spent, in a sort of limbo between death and life—neither ghosts nor yet fully sentient, floating in a dream that was not a dream, and a reality that counterfeited illusion.

All at once the pall of mist was rent in front of them with dramatic suddenness, and Fortuné had a momentary glimpse of something that looked like a great white wing.

"Was that a sail?" asked Raymonde quietly, who had seen it too.

"The sloop, as I live!" cried her lover, starting up. "Pray God she does not run us down!" He shouted lustily, then threw himself again on the tiller.

But the damp white veil enclosed them once more. His shouts seemed to return upon themselves. Raymonde sat, her chin on her hand, on a thwart. He had never seen anyone so calm.

And then, gradually, the curtain of mist began to part a little on their left, and to draw upwards like the curtain of a theatre. And slowly, as on a stage, there came into sight the rock front of Guernsey, with its fall to sea-level, the sun catching the windows of St. Peter Port, and the white sails of the *Cormorant*, close reefed, about half a mile away.

Steadying the tiller against his body, Fortuné pulled out a sodden handkerchief and waved vigorously. Raymonde watched, not the plunging progress of the sloop, but her lover. And, as the mist melted in all directions from about them, the lovely, treacherous,

baffled sea of the Channel Islands began to be blue again with the beguiling laughter that hides a hundred graves.

" She is putting about—she has seen us ! " said La Vireville, lowering his arm.

Then, and then only, did Raymonde de Guéfontaine show the whole of her heart. For she cast herself sobbing on her lover's breast, clinging to him as she had not clung during all the stress of their hour of anguish.

" Fortuné, Fortuné, God is good ! I could not have borne to die to-day—to lose you so soon ! I love you better than my soul. . . . I have always loved you—always, always. . . ."

He strained her closer to him, seeing nothing but her wet eyes that looked into his at last.

" You are the woman I have waited for all my life ! I knew it before, but now . . . a thousand times more clearly ! "

And as the sloop, shaking out her canvas, bore gallantly towards them, his lips, salt with the brine of the just-weathered death, sealed on hers the knowledge of a happiness whose full security those very waves had taught them, never to be in question again.

THE END

15940